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FOUNDING EDITOR	ANDREW CREAGH andrew@DNAmagazine.com.au
ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE	DAVID SHOEMAKER david@DNAmagazine.com.au
ONLINE COORDINATOR	CHRIS GILLIES online@DNAmagazine.com.au
DESIGN	CYB ELIZALDE cyb@cyb-elizalde.com
GROOMING EDITOR	WILL FENNELL hello@willfennell.com.au
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR	MARC ANDREWS marc.richard.andrews@gmail.com
STYLE EDITOR	JOSHUA HEATH Joshua@joshuaheath.com.au
BOOK REVIEWER	GRAEME AITKEN graeme@thebookshop.com.au
THEATRE REVIEWER	MATTHEW MYERS mattmyers@ozemail.com.au
SUBSCRIBER SERVICES	RAE MILLS DNAsupport@DNAmagazine.com.au
CONTRIBUTORS	**PHOTOGRAPHERS:** JADE YOUNG, CHRISTIAN SCOTT, BLAKE YELAVICH, PAUL FREEMAN, SEAN SINCLAIR, JOSE YUTIU. **WRITERS:** TORSTEN HOJER, IAN HORNER, PAUL JOSEPH, TIM BENZIE, HENDRI YULIUS WIJAYA, ANDREW M POTTS, CONALL FERGUSON.
MODEL FOR DNA	DNAMAGAZINE.COM.AU/SUBMIT
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	BURNTTOAST@DNAMAGAZINE.COM.AU
PITCH A STORY	FEATURES@DNAMAGAZINE.COM.AU

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For newsagency enquiries: 1300 131 169.

January 2021

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FROM THE EDITOR

ANDREW CREAGH

“AMERICA IS BACK”

The car-crash spectacle of Tiffany Trump talking up her dad’s gay cred... we’ll never see the likes of it again!

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Poor Tiffany. They don’t let her out much and when they do, they send her on a fool’s errand.

There she was, bouncing around the stage at something called “Trump Pride”, all bubbly and giggly, slightly overwhelmed at the chance to speak in public.

Her one job was to make the case that her dad, President Donald Trump, was a pro-LGBTQIA+ president and the best friend we could have in the White House.

“My father has always supported all of you,” gushed Tiffany. “Prior to politics, he supported the LGBQIIA+... I’m here speaking to you... I wouldn’t lie.”

And there it was, another reason for Donald to be disappointed in the daughter who isn’t Ivanka.

> “We wanted to remind the world and our US readers that the USA is bigger than Trump.

No doubt Tiff had been well briefed: “Listen, you’ll have to leave the T out of the LGBTQIA+ because your dad banned them from the military. Plus, he’s kinda in favour of businesses and institutions being allowed to legally discriminate against them, so just drop the T. No-one will notice.”

It was noticed.

Tiffany didn’t get to shine alone. There was another speaker: Richard Grenell, a career public servant, gay man, Trump supporter, and the US ambassador to Germany between 2018-20. Why did he only last two years in this prestigious posting, you ask? A lack of diplomatic skill, unprofessionalism and hanging out with far-right extremists, according to many news sources.

Grenell was also there to spruik Donald Trump’s gay-lovin’ ways.

“Republicans are better on gay rights than Democrats – and they hate it,” he asserted. There were cheers from the Trump Pride crowd. (I say “crowd” but it didn’t sound like the room was very full and there were no shots of the audience in the video so I’m using the word “crowd” loosely.)

“I say, Mr President, the gays love you,” again, more cheers.

And then Richard dropped this clanger: “Remember, it is the Republican Party that has delivered marriage equality.”

Say what?

Even the Trump Pride “crowd” didn’t buy that one.

Let’s just remind ourselves, marriage equality in the USA was delivered by the US Supreme Court’s ruling in the Obergefell v Hodges case and arrived during the Obama-Biden administration. It was the Republicans who came up with DOMA, the Defence Of Marriage Act, which hoped to preserve marriage as being solely between a man and a woman.

If you are one of the few LGBTQIA+ people who still think Trump was a champion of our cause, note that he has not supported the Equality Act, “a bill to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, housing, credit, education and jury service.”

Why wouldn’t an allegedly pro-gay president support that? Because religious evangelists, who vote for Trump *en masse*, believe “it poses devastating and unprecedented threats to religious freedom,” according to The Alliance Defending Freedom.

If you want an exhaustive list of anti-gay Trump initiatives there’s the TAP (Trump Accountability Project) at www.glaad.org/tap/donald-trump

The newly elected Biden-Harris leadership team have pledged to pass the Equality Act during their first 100 days in office. This would protect gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queer and intersex people, our allies and, yes, trans people from everyday oppression. It would mean that LGBTQIA+ people in the USA could live, work, marry, operate businesses, study and raise families like every other American. It is not too much to ask. It’s simple human rights, and time the US accorded it to its citizens.

As we go to press, Trump is still claiming that the election was rigged and that he won. He has raked in over $207 million in donations from supporters who believe he needs the money to fund his legal challenges to the election outcome which have, so far, all failed because there is no evidence of significant electoral fraud that would change the outcome of the election. He’s golfing as Americans are dying of COVID-19 at a rate of one every 30 seconds (according to *The Sydney Morning Herald*). Even Republicans have disavowed him.

In this issue, we celebrate the victory of progressive, inclusive politics over the divisive, hateful rhetoric of the last four years. Regular DNA readers will be aware that over the last couple of years we have created two USA-themed issues. We wanted to remind the world and our US readers that the USA is bigger than Trump. We have accentuated the positives and celebrated the reasons the US still holds a special place in our hearts.

President-elect Joe Biden has declared, “America is back.” Cher has tweeted, “🇺🇸 IS PART OF THE 🌎 AGAIN 🥳.” Either way, it’s a brand new day for the USA.

Founding Editor
Andrew Creagh

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CHRISTIAN SCOTT

DIEGO ARNARY ON THE COVER OF #251

Diego is a very handsome man. I love his magnificent body with his fantastic hairy chest and pleasure trail, sexy scruff and hairy legs. This is a fantastic cover of a beautiful, hot, sexy man. I love hairy chested men on the cover . – *Michael Frainey*

Watered, lathered, speedo-ed and completely HOT. Tick this cover as BEYOND GORGEOUS. And another tick to DNA for another incredible cover. – *Alexi Michael*

I shall dive into his underwear! – *Ethan Van*

THOMAS BANKS' QUEST FOR LOVE

DNA reviewed the award-winning documentary about Thomas, a gay man with cerebral palsy.

This, in my eyes, is the most marginalised of an already marginilised community. The queer disabled hardly have a voice and it's very difficult being heard by an audience who don't wanna hear! The able-bodied community disregard this community, and all the disable want is to be accepted and loved just like everybody else. The price that the disabled pay for their "non-perfection" is a hefty one. They are bullied and rejected to no end. It saddens me that in our own community, we leave others behind. What kind of community/society is that?!? – *Ryan Fazail Mehtar*

CHALLENGING THE STIGMAS AND STEREOTYPES AROUND LIVING WITH HIV

Three men discuss HIV stigma and stereotypes in DNA #251.

You think it's bad now, you should have seen it 40 years ago. Nobody lived with it. – *Marty Wayne*

I'm 37, so I was in it, and my mum was a volunteer buddy for people dying of AIDS. I agree times and outcomes have moved so far. And I am grateful to have these life-saving medications and what was fought for by the pioneers in the early days of the AIDS pandemic. But there is much work still to be done. – *Charlie Tredway (one of the men featured in the DNA story)*

It's a shame that the stigma exists. I just don't understand people's attitudes. It shows that ignorance still exists. – *Robert Schulz*

The story makes clear that if an HIV-positive person has no detectable virus in their blood (because they are taking their meds), then there is zero chance of them transmitting the virus to someone else during sex: U=U. I think many of us have heard that and we "know" it but we must overcome our prejudice. – *Marcus*

DUSTIN LANCE BLACK

Ian Horner interviewed the Hollywood screen writer and activist in DNA #250.

I just wanted to compliment the photographer for the work they did on the article on Dustin Lance Black. I actually gasped when I turned the page to see the beautiful black-and-white photos. Excellent job. – *Ronald Erickson*

HUNGARIAN ANTI-GAY POLITICIAN BUSTED AT 20-MAN ORGY

Reported at DNAmagazine.com

It's always the ones against it you need to watch! – *Geoff Flack*

Homophobia is a projection of one's in ability to accept their true selves. – *Marc Amida*

He's so deep into his under-cover mission! – *Geoffery Chiaming Chang*

I love happy endings. – *Victor Sanchez Olan*

He made himself the enemy of the same-sex community, and right now he's a suicide risk. His world and all the bullshit he constructed has collapsed. Someone call him. (Not you Karma. Your work is done). – *Chris Gus*

From The Ed: This is a familiar story but, as much as we love to see hypocrisy exposed, he is still part of the LGBTIQA+ family, and Chris Gus' point about his mental health is a good one. We don't know why he chose to lead a double life, but we do know that coming out is hard and in some countries very dangerous, and we know that self-harm and suicide rates among us are also high. Perhaps we feel within our rights to judge him but he is also one of us.

LOCKER GEAR

JOHNIE BRAVO BY JOAN CRISOL

This shoot lit up our website and social media last month. There's a lot more Johnie to see in the extra pages of the Digital edition of this issue. Go to DNAmagazine.com and click Shop to find out more.

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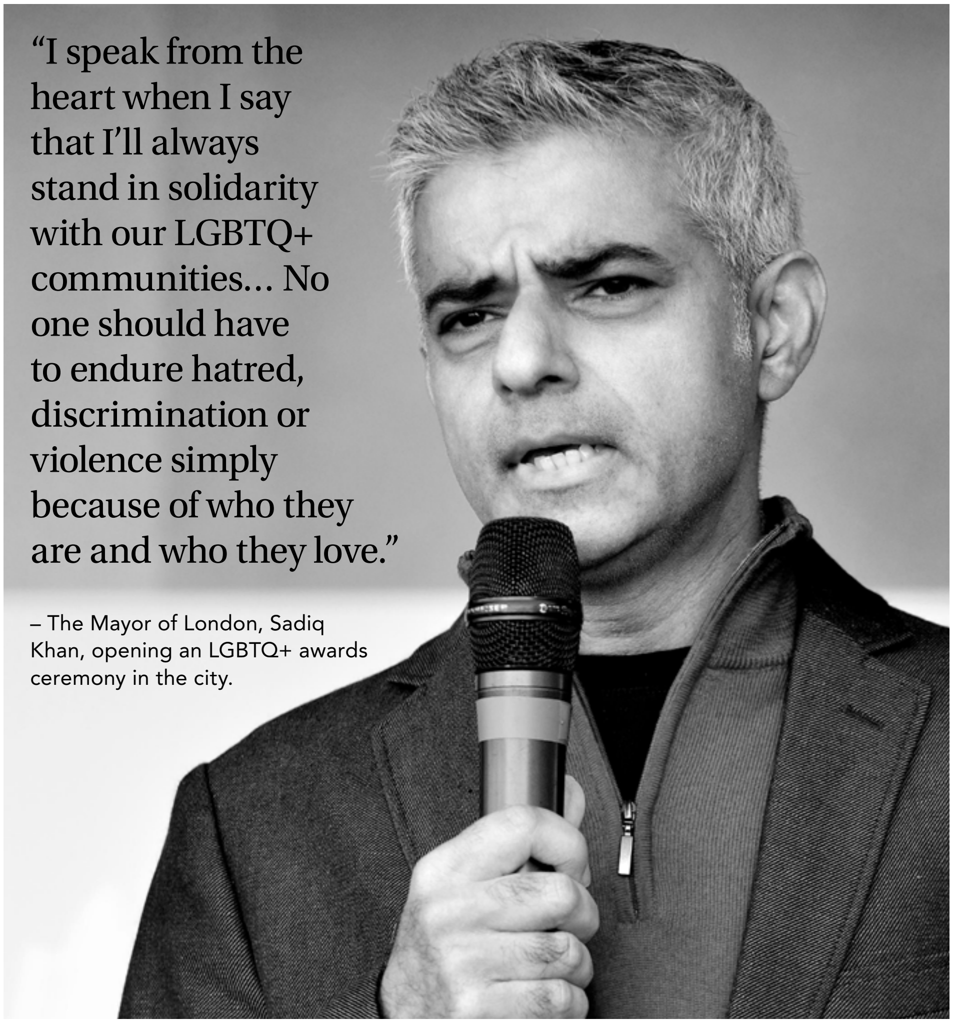
COMPILED BY TORSTEN HØJER



> "I speak from the heart when I say that I'll always stand in solidarity with our LGBTQ+ communities... No one should have to endure hatred, discrimination or violence simply because of who they are and who they love."

– The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, opening an LGBTQ+ awards ceremony in the city.

ALAMY

SWISS EQUALITY Switzerland moves towards finally joining other progressive nations in Europe by legalising same-sex marriage. A recent vote by politicians proved overwhelmingly in support of marriage equality. It's a major step for the country, which is lagging behind its neighbours.

DANCEFLOORS REOPEN Sydney starts to reopen nightclubs following zero cases of locally transmitted COVID-19 infections for almost a month. Authorities say they are trying to ease restrictions to allow nightlife to return to normal, while being cautious about situations that could cause a further outbreak. Many in the LGBTQIA+ community welcome the news, citing the need to socialise to improve mental health after a difficult year.

ACEH ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE Indonesia's province of Aceh continues its anti-gay violence by saying it will publicly cane two men for having sex. Local reports say the lovers were caught by neighbours and handed over to the police. They are awaiting trial.

STAR TRANSITIONS Hollywood star Elliot Page (formerly Ellen Page) breaks the internet by coming out as trans. The Oscar-nominated actor, who currently stars in the Netflix hit *The Umbrella Academy* (pictured), says his "joy is real" at sharing his news with the world. Celebrities take to social media to post messages of support and love.

NETFLIX

NO GAY PANIC The "gay panic" defence – which enables violent abusers to claim they acted due to the advances of a gay man – becomes illegal throughout Australia. It comes as South Australia throws out the outdated and offensive law, becoming the final state in the country to do so.

PENGUIN DADS AGAIN! Sydney's famous gay penguins become dads for the second time, spreading joy across the internet. Sphen and Magic presented their adopted offspring to the team at the city's Sea Life Aquarium. The yet-to-be-named baby joins their first born, Lara.

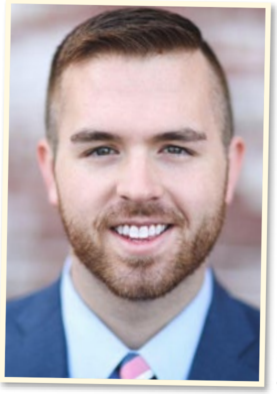
SEA LIFE AQUARIUM

CHINA GOES GAY

Activists in China launch a campaign for LGBTQ+ people to be recognised on the country's official census. China's existing census doesn't explicitly ask about sexuality and many citizens lie about their same-sex relationships. The activists are calling for all LGBTQ+ Chinese people to stand up and be counted to improve visibility and drive forward political rights.

OUT SPEAKER

Ryan Fecteau, 28, is re-elected to Maine's House Of Representatives and has been nominated by Democrats to be the next Speaker Of The House, making him both the youngest person and the first LGBTIQA person to hold the office. Fecteau joining the "Rainbow Wave" of LGBTIQA+ candidates who win seats in the recent United States election.



SUPPLIED

FRIES WITH THAT? A London McDonald's franchise gives G-A-Y nightclub a helping hand staying open during the UK's Stage Two lockdowns. It offers to sell meals alongside drinks at the club. Stage Two shuts clubs that only serve drinks. Nightclubs have faced restrictions since March, causing the owner of the club to install seating on the dance floor transforming it into a bar.

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HOMOPHOBES GET SLAYED! / COMPILED BY TORSTEN HØJER

HOMOPHOBIC PRIEST BUSTED ENJOYING GAY PORN

A New York Catholic priest, George Rutler, who has a track record of preaching anti-gay sermons about “sodomites” being against God was, allegedly, caught by a security guard wanking while watching hardcore gay porn on his office computer, reports *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*.

Realising he’d been busted, Rutler then, allegedly, assaulted the 22-year-old female security guard, Ashley Gonzalez, who reported the incident to the police and The Archdiocese Of New York.

Rutler has now “stepped aside” from the priesthood while an investigation is carried out. He has also been suspended from appearing as a host on an Eternal Word Television Network evangelical TV show.

Rutler has denied the claims.

ANTI-GAY POLITICIAN BUSTED AT GAY ORGY

He’s the anti-gay Hungarian politician who fought against marriage equality in his country, going so far as to rewrite elements of Hungary’s constitution to only recognise marriage as between one man and one woman.

But Jozsef Szajer has now been forced to resign from his role as a Member of European Parliament for Hungary after being, allegedly, caught at a gay orgy in Brussels, *The Guardian* reports.

Police raided the sex party, which was illegal due to COVID-19 restrictions, and allegedly discovered Szajer clambering along outside guttering in a bid to evade them. An ecstasy pill was found in his possession which, he says, was planted on him.

Szajer has claimed diplomatic immunity to potentially avoid prosecution.

HOMO-HATING POLITICIAN BUSTED WITH SHIRTLESS MAN AT HOME

Homophobic Lithuanian MP, Petras Grazulis often uses his platform to call gay men “sick” and has drafted laws imposing fines on anyone speaking positively about homosexuality.

He calls on politicians in the country to rally against gay men, claiming that we pose a threat to children and society.

However, during a video meeting in November with his country’s culture department, a shirtless hunk was seen hovering behind Grazulis, shocking those watching. Grazulis responded by shutting off the call, but the video went viral on social media, with citizens, politicians and religious leaders all asking questions about the identity of the man and his relationship to Grazulis.

At first he said the man was his son, but then changed his story to suggest that a journalist had used “advanced video technology” to insert the shirtless man into the call.

TEACHERS BUSTED IN ANTI-GAY CHAT

A group of schoolteachers in New Jersey, USA, have been busted sharing anti-gay views in a chat room.

They’re entitled to their views, however, they were on a video call with students at the time, and posted homophobic comments about another teacher during the call.

The teachers questioned why students were allowed to spend time with a gay gym teacher, and speculated that kids with same-sex parents would be “fucked up” in later life.

The students reported the comments to the school head and local authorities, who launched an investigation and distanced themselves from the teachers involved.

An online petition has been activated, calling for all of the anti-gay teachers to be fired.

“These homophobic comments do not reflect our community’s values, nor do they represent our beliefs in the Borough of Dumont,” said Mayor Andrew LaBruno on Facebook. “We are an inclusive and welcoming community.”

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THIEF OF HEARTS

Kenyth Mogan returns with an album of covers, a new man, and plenty of sordid tales! By Marc Andrews.

DNA: Welcome back. We've missed you. *Star Stealer* is your latest project. Why an album of cover versions?
Kenyth: I'd been working on an album of original songs but when covid happened production stopped and I fell into a bit of a depression. I was listening to all the songs I grew up with and realising how much better they made me feel.

The first single, *You And Me* is a little-known Tiffany track from 1990's *Jetsons: The Movie*.
I loved *Jetsons: The Movie* and have been singing *You And Me* almost as long as *I Think We're Alone Now*. I sent the demo to one of the original songwriters, Steven McClintock, just to see what he thought. Not only did he like it, he has become incredibly supportive of the song, my career and me as a person. I ended up recording two other songs of his.

It's also a rock song – are you channelling your inner rock diva?
Yes! I've done brite-pop, dance, adult contemporary… Pop rock is my favourite though. It's fun and something you can move to but I also get to be more wild and rough vocally.

We recognise a couple of the tracks – *Mickey* and three more Tiffany hits, *I Think We're Alone Now, Kid On A Corner* and *If Love Is Blind* – tell us about some of the others.
One of my favourites is *Magic*, an Olivia Newton-John song from 1980's *Xanadu*. My song *Real Me* is in Del Shore's film *A Very Sordid Wedding*, a sequel to the film and TV series *Sordid Lives*, both of which Olivia was part of. It's my ode to her. I love the *Sordid Lives* series so this was an honour for me.

There are also two Belinda Carlisle tracks.
I love Belinda. I have every single she's ever released. She has one of the most recognizable voices in pop music.

> “Embrace your weirdness. Life is more fun that way.

Julie Brown's *I Like 'Em Big And Stupid* is included as a camp classic!
It is! I loved *Earth Girls Are Easy* and Julie Brown is so stinking funny!

You also cover Selena and singer/songwriter Lois Blaisch.
Selena is an inspiration even to those of us who don't speak Spanish. I chose to cover *Is It The Beat?* And Lois Blaisch – she wrote so many songs I grew up loving including *Rainbow Land* and Tiffany's *Could've Been*. I met her once at a Tiffany concert and we talked about *Rainbow Land* and how much it meant to me and how I was thinking of recording it. Without hesitation she said it'd be a good idea.

***Rainbow Land* is like the ultimate LGBT anthem. Was that the intention?**
I love that! I actually recorded it as a tribute to my grandmother after she had passed away. As one of my biggest supporters, she would be very proud to know that this is how *Rainbow Land* is being heard.

You tackle country queen Reba McEntire's *Does He Love You* as a duet with Brendan Velasquez. How did that come about?
It was something Brendan and I had been talking about for a long time. We both love the song and thought it would be a lot of fun, we just never had the opportunity to release it until now. I hope we get to do a video at some point because Raymond's idea is hysterical.

Most of the songs have previously been sung by women. Was the intention with *Star Stealer* to put a gay spin on these?
Yes. A good song can transcend gender and sexuality. Take Belinda's *Live Your Life Be Free*: I didn't change the lyrics so the object of my affection in the song is a man who is living unhappily with a woman. It's a song a lot of queer people can relate to.

How's your love life going at present?
I met a guy just before the pandemic. We're texting and taking time getting to know one another.

What are the big issues that concern you most at the moment?
Just trying to get back to some semblance of normalcy with everything that's happened with covid.

What's your message to the readers of DNA?
Have courage and embrace your weirdness. Life is more fun that way.

Star Stealer

MORE: Star Stealer is available on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon and all major digital retailers. Find Kenyth on Facebook and Instagram @KenythOfficial.

WITH WILL FENNELL

BOYS' BASICS 101

A beginner's guide to modern grooming for guys.

Growing up in a household of women – my mother and four sisters – lead me into the life of nothing more than a common thief.

But, much like Robin Hood, I chose carefully what I stole and from whom. It wasn't sweets and treats from the local store. No, from an early age, my sole curiosity was in my sisters' beauty regimes. I mainly stole from the same sister, the mean one, and while in the beginning it was just my finger in her lip gloss when she wasn't looking, by the time I was 10 I'd moved on to the actual thieving of all my sisters' beauty lotions and potions.

I wasn't a budding drag queen, although I could bang out a ripper rendition of Olivia's *Hopelessly Devoted To You* into a hairbrush. It was those little stolen pots, tubes and sprays that were the beginning of my lifelong love of skin care, beauty and make-up.

After my room was ransacked by one of my sisters/victims, imagine my dismay at being told that playing with cosmetics was not what little boys did. The prevailing view at the time was that little boys should play with footballs, not their sisters' hairspray.

But how far we have come since the '90s. (Okay, the '80s.) Yesterday, I was scrolling through social media and saw the most masculine of men promoting a concealer that was clearly aimed at a straight male audience. How wonderful is that?

So, to all the naysayers who squashed a young boy's dreams of the perfect coiffure and lip shimmer, "I knew my time would come, so kiss my still firm and tight little ass!"

CONCEALER

If you're new to the idea of wearing any type of makeup, a great place to start is using a concealer to diminish the dark circles under your eyes. The secret is to colour match to your skin tone and apply in a way that no one will know you are wearing it. Practice by applying it sparingly, blending outwards using your fingertips.

> The prevailing view was that little boys should play with footballs, not their sisters' cosmetics.

DEODORANT

Aēsop.
Déodorant

I've thrown out my aluminium-based antiperspirant and swapped for a natural essential oil deodorant. The biggest difference I've found is not the smell under my arms – the natural one smells wonderful – but that the product allows me to sweat. The body is an amazing machine, we are meant to sweat, so it makes sense that we let it do this job.

VITAMIN C

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A little bit of sunshine is wonderful but sunlight floods the body, especially our skin, with free radicals that lead to wrinkles. In summer, we need to up the vitamin C we get in our diet and by applying it topically to our skin, under our sunscreen. For a vitamin C rich diet eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, especially papaya, parsley and capsicum.

FRAGRANCE

TOM FORD
LOST CHERRY
EAU DE PARFUM
50 ML

I want to have Tom Ford's babies. Not just one. I'd like us to try again and again. That's not why I love with his new fragrance, *Lost Cherry*. Unisex fragrances are not new; Calvin Klein did it with *One*. Now, whoever still says a man should smell differently to a woman should get onboard with the non-binary direction society is heading. This gorgeous unisex offering opens with a fruity burst then develops complex notes of cedar and sandalwood. Perfect for warm summer nights with Tom (and our children).

MORE: willfennell.com.au
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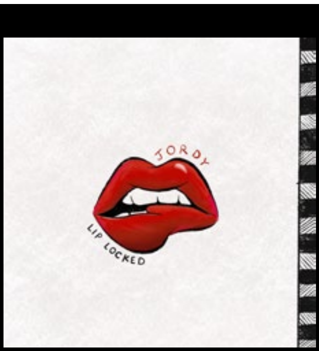
MUSIC

REVIEWS BY MARC ANDREWS

JORDY – LIPS LOCKED



It's 2021, time to leave the horrors of the past year behind and indulge in some cute new musical obsessions. So, welcome to the world stage, gay pop wannabe Jordy, who not only has the talent but the face and – most importantly – the catchy songs! His latest effort, *Lips Locked*, is a pure pop production which, a decade ago, would've been sung by a female diva but aimed at the gay market. It was, he says, inspired, "by a guy I was dating who just wouldn't open up. Anyone who knows me knows that I am the queen of oversharing; I wanna get past the surface level conversations". Music bible *Billboard* recently called Jordy a "rising queer pop artist" and with his winning combination of great hooks, dreamy looks and star quality bursting though he's ready to kiss the big time any time now.

> "Jordy has the looks, the hooks and the songs to kiss the big time.

DORIAN ELECTRA – MY AGENDA

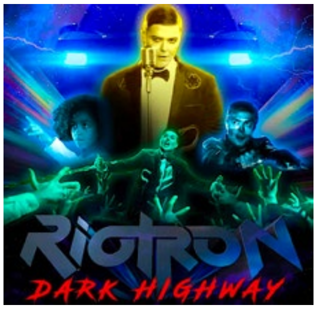
With an album boasting a song featuring both Pussy Riot and the Village People (the title track), you realise this is one helluva agenda. Transgender, genderfluid Dorian is all about the alt-pop experience and on their second album, *My Agenda*, calls it like they see it. Case in point, the album kicks off with the frantic and aggressive *F The World*. It's somewhere between electro-pop, punk and hardcore uproar – imagine Marilyn Manson and Billie Eilish had a gifted queer alien child with ADHD, which is a good thing by the way. Just don't expect much in the way of easy listening. At just over 25 minutes, this concept album about toxic masculinity is like a whiplash of forward-surging ideas, musicality and liberation.

KYLIE MINOGUE – DISCO

Kylie
DISCO

2020 is a year that will be remembered for many things, some affirmative (President Biden), some less so (Miss Corona Virus). Thankfully, it also heralded a batch of retro-disco releases from Dua Lipa, Lady Gaga, Jessie Ware, Róisín Murphy and, last but not least, Kylie Minogue. Her 15th album does exactly what its singular title suggests – reimagines the sounds of ABBA, The Bee Gees, Donna Summer and other '70s disco heroes into perky contemporary pop tunes. From the slinky *Miss A Thing* to the spacey *Supernova,* this rivals Kylie's previous disco reinvention, 2000's *Light Years*. The best track may be *Celebrate You* in which Kyles gives a discolicious shout out to the (Muscle) Marys in her life. Attagirl!

RIOTRON – DARK HIGHWAY



Out Canadian artist Riotron claims *Dark Highway* is "a metaphor for all bad decisions we make. You're going too fast, you're out of control but you don't stop. And then suddenly you can't stop." Riotron, better known to his mother as Jeff Fettes, is another pop persona plundering the vaults of club music of the past to enlighten his dark, moody synth-pop vibe. Even his stage name is an amalgamation of Duran Duran's 1982 hit *Rio* and 1982's *Tron* movie, which gives you some idea of the new wave terrain Riotron is digging. "My music is about forgiving ourselves for our flaws," he reveales. "It's about the transformation out of dark spaces and coming into the light."

JOHN ROBERTS – FREAKS

While plenty of pop artists are currently digging through the '70s/'80s back catalogue for sparks of inspiration, others are peering at the gay house music era of the '90s. Openly gay freak-lover JR is an American actor/singer who, up to this point, has been best known for voicing Linda in the animated sitcom *Bob's Burgers*. Produced by Junior Sanchez, *Freaks* is the LGBT+ dance floor darling you need in your life right now – pre-party, party and after-party anthem all in one. "It's a song about letting your freak flag fly," John explains, "an empowerment song for freaks and those who have been cast aside". Even the accompanying video has a real '90s vibe and deserves to be freakily massive.

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WITH MATTHEW MYERS

ON WITH THE SHOWS!

This time last year, a full schedule of anticipated productions were set to grace our stages, then coronavirus changed everything… now the lights are coming back on.

Hamilton.

Last year was a challenging time for all. The coronavirus threw our lives and the entire world into chaos. Amid the many disruptions, the entertainment world was hit particularly hard. Theatres were closed, productions cancelled, jobs lost.

Many in the industry got creative with online streaming, but the novelty soon wore thin and virtual theatre just couldn't replace the frisson of real-life theatre.

The good news is that, thanks to Australia's vigilant lockdown, our marque lights are shining once more and red curtains are set to rise around the country once more. Theatre is back in 2021!

Of course, the most anticipated theatrical event for 2021 is the Australian premiere of *Hamilton* at the Lyric Theatre in Sydney in March. Book your seats now because it's full steam ahead for the record-breaking show about America's founding father Alexander Hamilton. Hailed as a masterpiece, the show has won the Tony, Grammy, Oliver and Pulitzer Prize, and had a profound impact on culture, education and politics in the USA. Our local cast includes Daniel Assetta, Brent Hill, Lyndon Watts, Chloe Zuel and Jason Arrow as Hamilton.

As the year begins, our various state theatres are rolling out a program of productions both postponed and brand new. The Sydney Theatre Company is presenting the Australian premiere of the acclaimed coming-out and coming-of-age musical *Fun Home* with Marina Pryor and Ryan Gonzalez; and the Ruth Park classic *Playing Beatie Bow*, which takes a historical journey through Sydney's Rocks precinct (coincidentally the home of the STC).

The Darlinghurst Theatre Company is bringing back the global hit *Once* for a 21-week tour of metropolitan and regional Australia, and the Hayes Theatre will reopen its doors with the Mel Brooks musical *Young Frankenstein* staring Matthew Becker.

Meanwhile, the Ensemble Theatre will present Shane Jacobson's *Kenny* starring Ben Wood, and David Williamson's *Nearer The Gods* with Rowan Davie, and the classic suspense thriller *The Woman In Black* with Garth Holcombe.

In South Australia the Adelaide Festival will see Paul Capsis in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge Of San Luis Rey*, Jonathan Biggins as Paul Keating in *The Gospel According To Paul* and Margaret Harvey as the formidable Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*

Once.

The Perth Festival will stage *The Cherry Orchard*, an Australian makeover of Chekhov's final masterpiece with Humphrey Bower. Queensland Theatre will present Shakespeare's *The Taming Of The Shrew* directed by Damien Ryan, and Thornton Wilder's three-act play *Our Town* directed by Lee Lewis, and *Triple X*, the story of a Wall Street banker who has an affair with a trans performer – the day before his wedding. Writer Glace Chase also plays the main character, Dexie.

> “Thanks to Australia's vigilant lockdown, our marque lights are shining once more.

Making a very welcome return are the hunky men of *Matador*. Its exotic and lusty mix of burlesque, ballet, circus and steamy Latin numbers are a delight to the eye and the soul! New to the cast are dancers and aerialists Liam Dummer and Liam Roodhouse.

Chess: The Musical Concert will play at Melbourne's Regent Theatre, *Friends: The Musical Parody!* at The Comedy and the stage version of movie classic *The Wedding Singer* at the Athenaeum. The Crown Theater, Perth will present *The Boy From Oz* and *Bat Out Of Hell: The Musical* will begin at the RAC Arena before touring to other states.

Many will be pleased to see the return of the 9/11-based musical *Come From Away*, which begins its encore Melbourne performance at The Comedy Theatre in February, before

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Friends: The Musical Parody.

>> heading to Brisbane QPAC's Lyric Theatre and then Sydney's Capitol.

The Melbourne Princess Theatre will finally see the anticipated return of *Harry Potter And The Cursed Child* as it continues its lengthy and headlining run. In fact, with the London, New York and San Francisco productions suspended (at time of printing), Melbourne is the only city currently running the show.

Other large productions scheduled for Australia this year are Disney's *Frozen, 9 to 5: The Musical* and *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* but the anticipated *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* may take a little longer. With COVID-19 throwing original schedules off kilter and with uncertainty still in the air, anything could happen over 2021. But if all continues in a positive way, many planned shows will still make their way onto the stage in later months.

Regardless, all theatres will be required to abide by government-regulated COVID-Safe Plans, with safety measures including face masks, attendee registers, hand sanitising stations and anti-viral theatre cleaning. Although entry times may be staggered, standard seating is still in place.

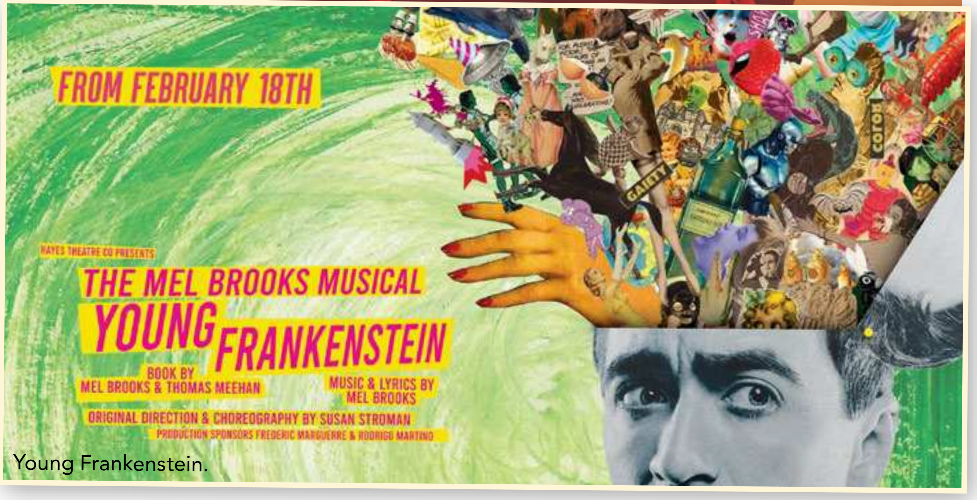
The social impact of COVID-19 has inspired local creativity including the Malthouse Theatre's streaming of *The Lockdown Monologues*. Earlier this year, Music Theatre Melbourne (MTM) launched a musical competition created specifically around the pandemic. The winner of COVID The Musical is Australian/New Zealand composer Isaac Shatford. Given the working title *Ruth*, Shatford's story centers on a family reunion prolonged through lockdown, resulting in a discovery of many skeletons in the closet. *Ruth* is expected to have its premier in September.

Considering that Broadway theatres are expected to remain closed until June and the London West End faces a tiered approach to openings, Australia is in a pretty good position. However, remembering that international tourism is still at zero, our productions – and economy – are relying on local business. So treat yourself to a ticket.

2020 was tough for the live entertainment industry but the glowing lights outside our theatres have become poignant beacons of optimism – just like the ending of a really grand musical! •

Matador.

> “International tourism is still at zero so our productions are relying on local business.



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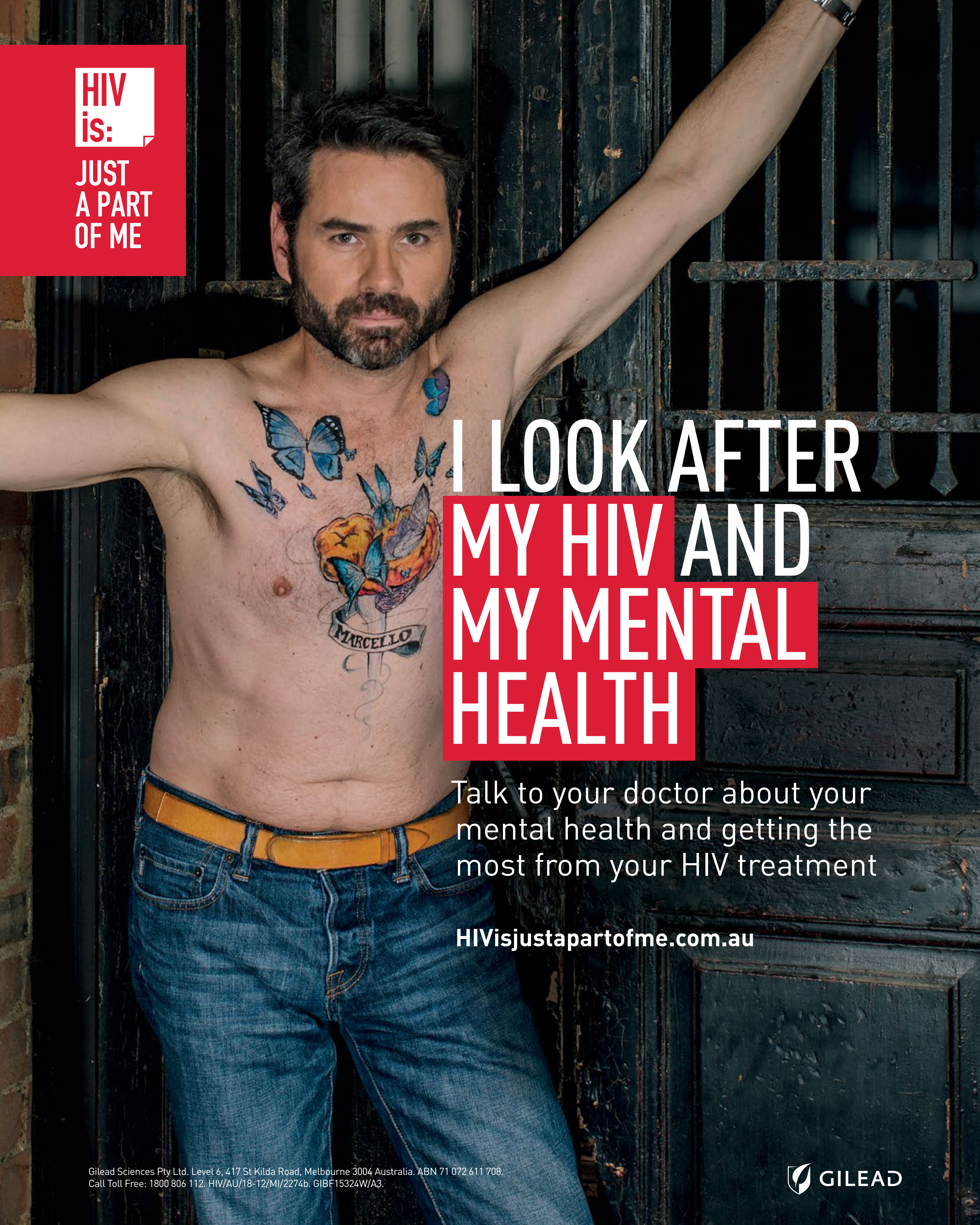
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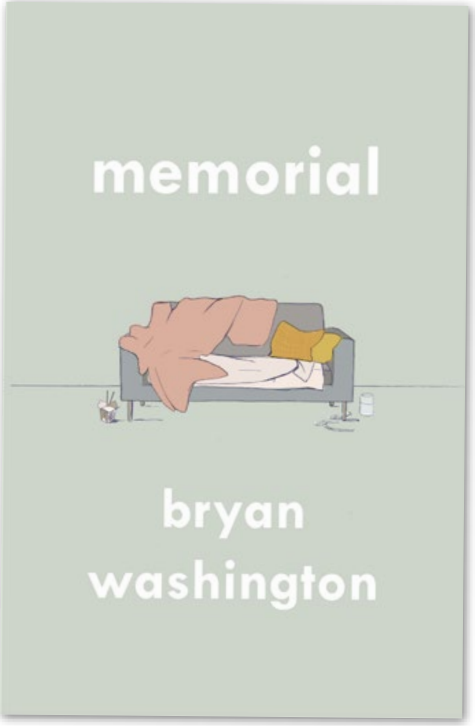
REVIEWS BY GRAEME AITKEN AND HENDRI YULIUS WIJAYA

BEST SUMMER READS

MEMORIAL

By Bryan Washington

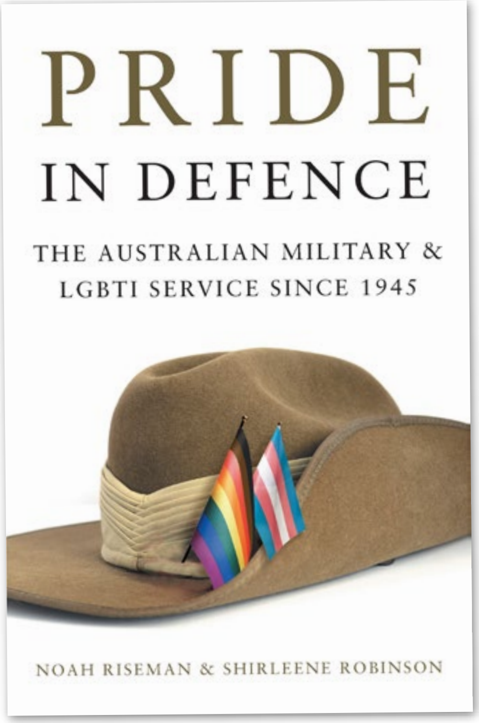
This is a beautiful example of the strength of storytelling in a minimalist style, capturing the emotional undercurrents flowing within and across the characters. In sharp, pithy sentences it depicts a relationship between an Asian man and a Black man. Washington unseals the unsaid: estrangement, pain, despair and, equally, belonging, through the multilayered intimate attachments between gay men, an acerbic mother, a dying father, and strangers they meet along the way.
– *Hendri*



PRIDE IN DEFENCE

By Noah Roseman and Shirleene Robinson

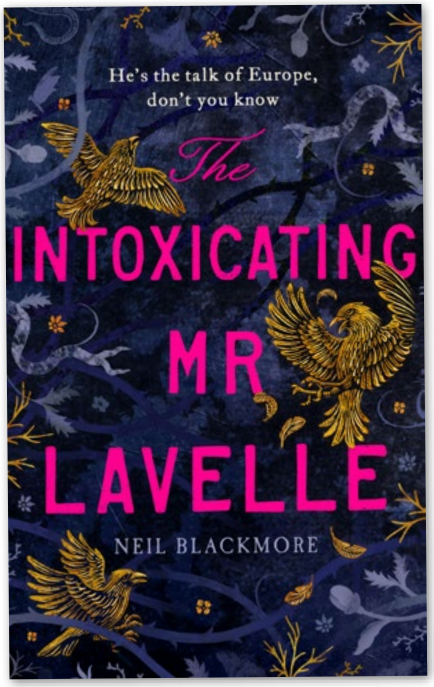
Over the past few decades, the success of the LGBTQIA+ movement has led to our inclusion in the Australian military. This shift reflects official policy and the cultural changes within military institutions themselves. What has made this tremendous shift possible? Drawing on more than 140 interviews and previously unexamined historic records, *Pride In Defence* examines the importance of policy transformation in making an organisation more inclusive, and the power of tolerance in institutional change.
– *Hendri*



THE INTOXICATING MR LAVELLE

By Neil Blackmore

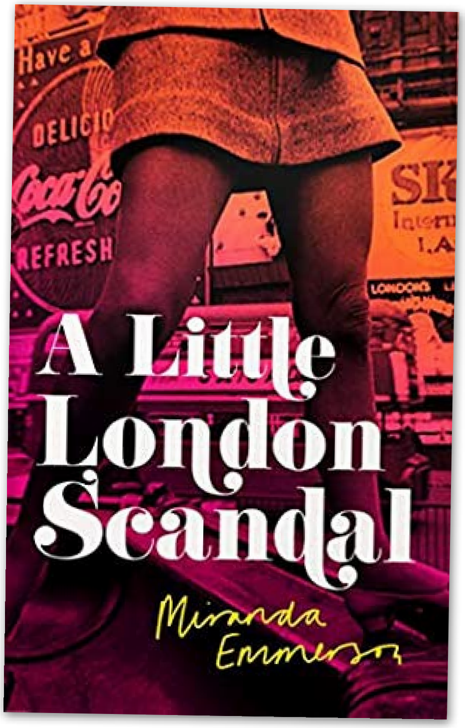
Set in the 1760s, two sheltered London brothers, Benjamin and Edgar Bowen, embark on their Grand Tour of Europe. Impeccably schooled by their mother, they hope to conquer society and meet people of quality. However, the brothers' pedigree is not aristocratic but from the merchant class – their father owns a maritime company and is not even English, but Welsh! The brothers soon realise that class is not something that can be attained by education and aspiration. When Benjamin meets and becomes enraptured by the unconventional and charismatic Horace Lavelle, his real education begins, including his physical education! – *Graeme*



A LITTLE LONDON SCANDAL

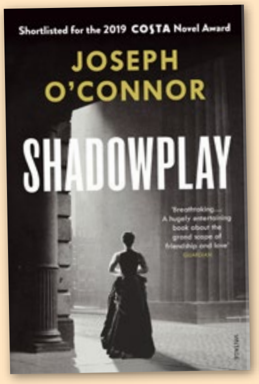
By Miranda Emmerson

1967 London: Nik Christou is estranged from his family and has become a Piccadilly Circus rent boy to survive. One night, a trick goes badly awry and he finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and collared for a murder he didn't commit. Luckily for him, theatre dresser Anna Treadway takes an interest in his case and already knows the DS who is investigating the crime. Doggedly, she sets about finding the truth – which involves rent boys, their clients, MPs, members of an exclusive gentlemen's club, actors and staff from West End theatres! Some of these characters have appeared in an earlier novel but this story stands alone and it's not necessary to have read the earlier book.
– *Graeme*



2020'S TOP TEN BOOKS

Compiled by Graeme and Hendri



1. Shadowplay by Joseph O'Connor
This historical novel explores the life of Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula,* and depicts him as a closeted gay man with complicated relationships with the famous real-life actors Henry Irving and Ellen Terry.

2. The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett
The divergent fate of twin sisters – one who passes for white while the other remains black – challenges the nature of identity, revealing new possibilities to move beyond society's bounds.

The VANISHING HALF
BRIT BENNETT

3. A Traveller At The GatesOf Wisdom by John Boyne
From Palestine in AD1 to a colony in outer space in AD 2080, this is imaginative storytelling that takes Boyne's skills in a dynamic and exciting direction.

4. Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart
An emotionally charged portrait of the relationship between an alcoholic woman and her queer son. Stuart captures the power of their bond in a world shattered by poverty.

5. Swimming In The Dark by Tomasz Jedrowski
First love is a common subject for gay fiction, but this debut novel so distinctive for its setting in early 1980s communist Poland, with the added tension of the two men having different political sensibilities.

6. Real Life by Brandon Taylor
The passionate encounter between a black gay man and a white straight-identified man in the search for their true selves, free from race, class and gender.

7. The Adversary by Ronnie Scott
This Australian debut novel has a wry charm and a distinctive literary style. There's very little plot, yet it's a thoroughly engaging read: witty, very well-written, genuinely fresh.

8. Bestiary by K-Ming Chang
Full of spirits and creatures from Taiwanese and Chinese folktales, this wildly inventive novel blurs the line between reality and dreams.

9. Cleanness by Garth Greenwell
Returning to the same setting (Bulgaria) that made his debut novel *What Belongs To You* distinctive, this is edgy, intelligent, candid writing about sex and intimacy between men.

10. The Death of Vivek Oji by Akwaeke Emezi
Emezi's poetic storytelling explores how loss and sorrow can bring us to a new understanding of love, life and identity that can't always be captured by language.

RETROSPECTIVE

By Richard Matias

RETRO
SPECTIVE
RICHARD MATIAS

Three years on from his first book, *Liberated* Perth photographer Matias confides that he has liberated himself and now feels bolder and less inhibited in the work he produces. The result is an abundance of full-frontal nudity!

Many of Matias' models are also his friends so there is a deep level of trust and intimacy in the images.

Readers from outside Australia – currently unable to enter the country during isolation – will love the opening series of bold, vibrant images of speedo-clad men on the beach and at the pool, and the later shots without any swimwear at all. These are quintessentially Australian images with an extra resonance for locals as the beach was out of bounds for a period in 2020.

A striking series of moody, ambiguous images from inside a steamy shower are equally sexy. There are colourful images of drag queens posed with semi-naked men, and some impressive portraits of Irish drag legend and activist, Panti Bliss. Although the colour images in the book are very vibrant, the black-and-white nude images are even more stunning and masterful, reminiscent of the work of Australian photographer James Houston from the early 2000s. – *Graeme*

MORE: The Bookshop Darlinghurst specialises in LGBTIQ books. Tel: (02) 9331 1103. Email: info@thebookshop.com.au. Web: thebookshop.com.au. Visit: 207 Oxford Street, Sydney.

REVIEWS BY IAN HORNER

THE PROM (Netflix)
Let's face it, if anyone's going to out-*Glee Glee* it's Ryan Murphy. *The Prom* is a defiantly catchy meringue with *everything*: show-stopping dancing, swooping giddying dolly shots, a pulsing catchy score that demands you get up and dance, truckloads of sequins, enough spotlights to illuminate the Empire State, and a rousing queer message: "We're gonna change the world one lesbian at a time".

Plus, Meryl Streep ("Straight people like Broadway? I always thought that was a fairy tale").

What more could a gay boy want?

These days, Murphy can call on a wish list of actors, and he has. James Corden plays the gay boy wanting acceptance, Nicole Kidman is the third standby showgirl desperate for the leads to break their legs, Andrew Rannells is the actor with stars in his eyes, Meryl is the narcissistic grande dame. Together, they're a bunch of Broadway losers looking for a cause to champion to raise their profile and hopefully save their show.

They discover two lesbian schoolgirls, denied their coming-out at the high school dance by the conservative administration, despite the wave of national LGBTIQA+ acceptance. ("This is not America, this is Indiana!")

Kidman does a great Fosse jazz number, Rannells does the splits mid-air (watch for it) and the two girls are amazing. Add Kerry Washington (*Scandal, Little Fires Everywhere*) as one of the girls' mums.

It's corny, cliched, predictable and stereotyped but FFS, just go with it and have the time of your life. Obviously Murphy hadn't got all the showbiz whoop-de-doo out of his system after *Glee*. Maybe he has now, but don't bank on it. (132 mins, PG-13)

UNCLE FRANK (Amazon Prime Video)

This is a beautiful film about a man who lacked the courage to come out to his family until his late forties. When his father dies, Frank's partner insists on accompanying him back home for the funeral.

Several people who worked on this film had a vested interest in its message. Writer-director Alan Ball (American Beauty, Six Feet Under, True Blood) based it on his dad. Straight actor Paul Bettany agreed to play the title role because his own father came out at 63. Lebanese co-star Peter Macdissi wanted to play Frank's partner because he was so moved by the script's treatment of a gay Muslim. Macdissi is also Ball's real-life partner.

Indeed, all the characters ring true, but it's Macdissi's unapologetic sense of self and innate joy that makes the film soar.

The devastating reading of Frank's father's will is eclipsed by the reaching out of almost everyone else in the family. It's a road movie about the couple going home, but the real journey is inwards and the ride is well worth it. They're accompanied by Frank's insistent and questioning niece. Margo Martindale is marvellous as Frank's mum who comes to terms with her son's sexuality and her dead husband's ignorance. (95 mins)

SEX IN LOCKDOWN (Channel 4 in UK, SBS in Aust)

The stats in this UK TV special are British but everything else is relevant, fascinating, funny and sometimes odd – but no judgement. The producers lined up two gay couples, a lesbian couple and some straight couples to interrogate about their covid sex lives. And they're all quite up-front.

It seems sex toy sales went up 126 per cent – no surprises – and new users accounted for 40 per cent. What's unexpected is that role-play clothes including dog costumes (with wagging tails) for puppy play, went up a whopping 900 per cent!

An Australian straight couple separated by covid found new ways, with Sam taking a mould of his erect dick in Australia and sending it to Kelly in London, who loves it: "It's got veins and everything".

Young Richard and Stephen tried spanking for the first time and nominate the bed and shower as best locations. Middle-aged Zach and Ed long for doing it in the great outdoors but the closest they've got is booking a berth on a cruise ship.

Straight couple Vicky and boyfriend Ercan are amusing. Vicky admits she wouldn't say no a spanking, which shocks Ercan because, he says, "she won't even have sex on the sofa".

"It's really expensive," she replies.

Necessity remains that mother of invention. (46 mins)

PROUD (streams free on several world services)

This beautifully constructed TV trilogy follows the evolving of gay rights in France through one man's life experiences as the world transforms around him.

It's 1981 and still illegal to be gay in France. Francois Mitterrand is on the brink of re-election and the World Health Organisation thinks being gay is a mental illness. Victor, 17, is spotted by his father, a worksite manager, secretly hooking up with another boy on site. Dad doesn't go berserk but fires the friend.

Then Victor takes up with an older man, Serge. Dad tracks him down and calmly reads him the riot act. On his 18th birthday, Victor defiantly leaves home to be with Serge.

Jump to 1999, and domestic partnerships for same-sex couples are now legal. Victor is 35 and living with Serge and they plan to adopt a baby.

In 2013, gay marriage becomes law. Victor is 49, and a young Diego is coming to terms with the fact he has two dads.

The excellent writing transcends the subtitles and the production is gripping, passionate and well-wrought. Effort is made to respect the parents and the context of the times, while staying true to Victor's struggles and courage. (M15+, 156 mins, subtitled)

THE UNTOLD TALES OF ARMISTEAD MAUPIN (Netflix)

The Tales Of The City author's candour in telling his own story will win you over. His greatest influence was his grandmother, who said, "Any woman who's all-woman and any man who's all-man is a complete monster."

Maupin struggled to come out to himself and was a virgin until 25. At 30 he began the weekly column which became his novels, but the columns were viciously attacked for "glorifying decadence" so his editor gave him a quota – no more than 30 per cent gay, infuriating him.

Maupin outed Rock Hudson. "We were s'posed to keep the secret but the secret was damaging us all," he says. Ian McKellen tells how Maupin helped him out of the closet.

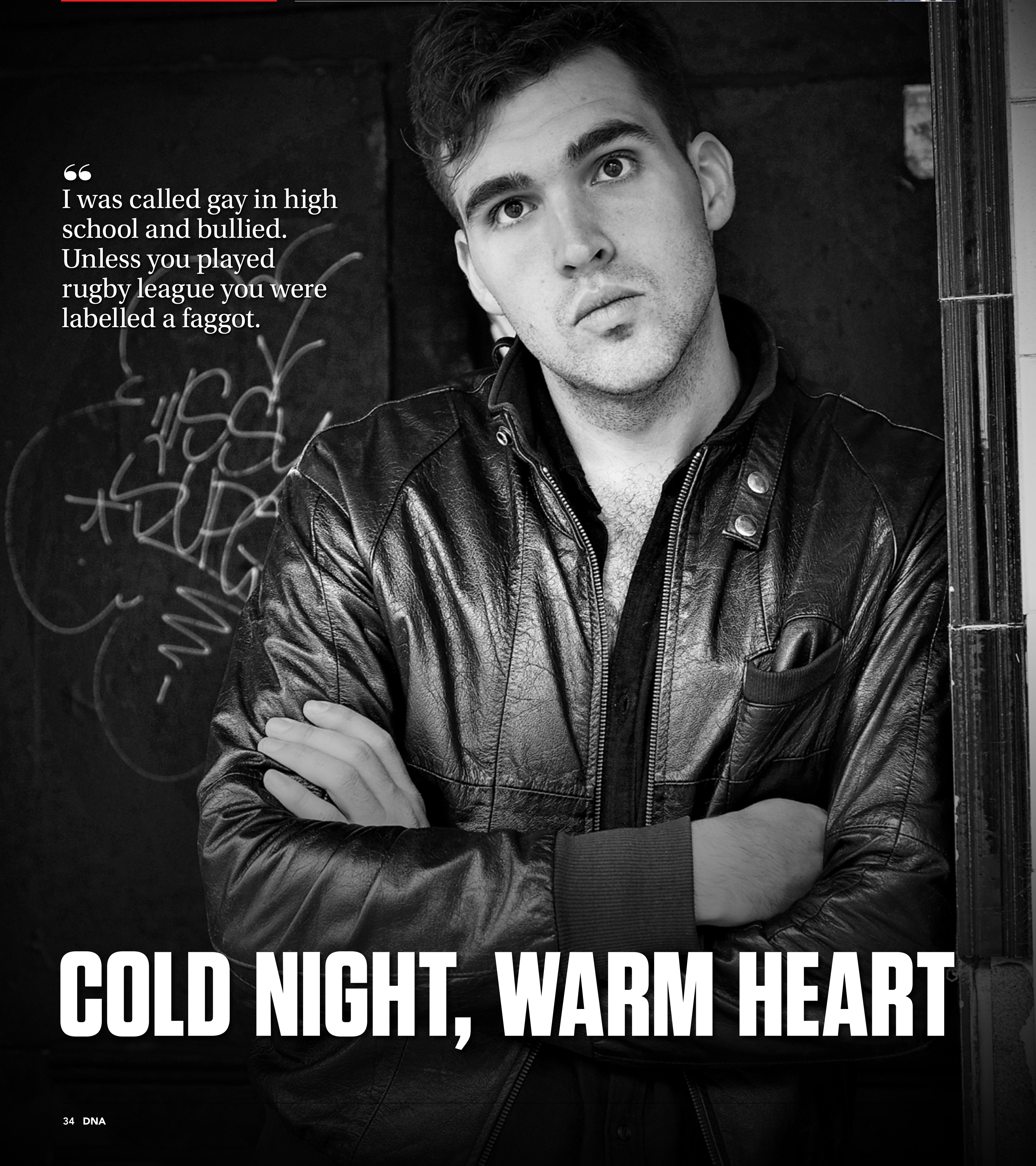
Maupin reveals, "Everyone I've loved since AIDS started has been HIV-positive". He met now-husband Christopher Turner after his diagnosis. He lists some former lovers, all now gone, and breaks down.

He refused to let Anita Bryant out him to his parents and wrote them a heartfelt letter which he later used in Tales. McKellen, Olympia Dukakis, Laura Linney (pictured), Jonathan Groff and Maupin read it. His dad wouldn't let his dying mum see it. "It'll only make her die faster."

Maupin's own story is, perhaps, more poignant than that of any of his characters. Finally, it's no longer untold. (M, 91 mins)

OUR STRAIGHT MATES

BY MATTHEW MYERS



> I was called gay in high school and bullied. Unless you played rugby league you were labelled a faggot.

COLD NIGHT, WARM HEART

In these times of angst and uncertainty, Thomas Keating's soulful, introspective songs strike a chord.

DNA: What inspired your acclaimed new single, *Cold Night*? Was it a Melbourne winter?
Thomas Keating: Yes! I moved from Sydney to Melbourne in the winter of 2018 and thought, "Holy shit! It's freezing here!" I lived in Fitzroy and was sleeping on a cold air mattress, and each morning I'd get up at 6am to walk to the café I worked at. I'd put on about 20 layers of clothes and head out through the dark to Clifton Hill. That's when the song came to me.

Has your new music been influenced by the craziness of 2020?
Absolutely! A lot of the songs I've been writing have related to covid, including themes of isolation and lockdown… reflecting on life and the world. It all sounds really deep but, at the moment, covid is the most prominent thing in our lives.

The Rolling Stones' new song, *Living In A Ghost Town* was written before covid but Mick Jagger adapted the lyrics. Is that something you would do?
I haven't thought about adapting songs I've already written but I think it would make me feel a bit of a fuddy-duddy. Apart from that, the music I'm working on now will probably come out after the pandemic is over and people have short memories!

Do you ever edit your lyrics because they become too personal?
I used to feel really uncomfortable singing about myself. I went through a period where I only wrote fictitious lyrics. I was in a relationship and had my personal experiences but all my lyrics were fiction. But, back in 2016 when I went solo, my lyrics became very personal and I haven't shied away from that since.

Who are your musical influences?
Around the age of 16 I became obsessed with The Beatles. I watched the anthology DVDs, got into every album and researched what they did in the studio. Their song writing is just phenomenal and still stands up today. Then there are artists like Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and Elliott Smith is a strong influence. I loved the Emo sound as a teenager and still do. I go in for Australian acts like Paul Kelly, The Panics, The Triffids and Cold Chisel.

You've also worked with Alex Gow, who is a previous DNA Straight Mate.
Yes, I've toured with Alex and Oh Mercy. Alex introduced me to The Triffids [indie '80s band from Western Australia]. I hadn't heard of them and one day he played me their classic *Wide Open Road* – and it was incredible. Alex has a really cool and unique understanding of Australian bands.

Who's your diva?
Nina Simone! She had a great "Fuck you! I know what I want!" attitude. She was an African-American singer who strived for success despite the disgusting levels of racial discrimination she experienced. There were some music clubs that would only allow her in the room when she was actually performing. I love her voice and my favourite would be *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*.

What's the most irresistible dance song?
The Band's *Don't Do It* from their 1979 *Last Waltz* concert. I remember playing in Brisbane years ago and before we went on stage, that song played and we all hit the dance floor.

As a Sydney boy, are you familiar with the gay clubs on Oxford Street?
Oh, yes! I remember the first time I ever went out to Sydney bars. I had just turned 18 and we ended up in The Colombian.

> "It's okay not to be okay. In fact, it's okay to feel shit sometimes!

Did anyone try to chat you up?
Hmm… maybe they did but I didn't really notice. We were a bit naïve back then and didn't realise we were in Sydney's gay heartland!

Have you ever had a mate come out to you?
I have, and it was very hard to see him going through such inner turmoil. It was a complicated situation because he was already married. So, it was quite sad, but it meant a lot to me that he thought of me as a safe enough friend to confide in.

Have you ever witnessed homophobia?
Heaps. I was called gay at high school and bullied. Unless you played rugby league you were labelled a "faggot". I was into music and drama and, before that, I was a dancer. I was voted "most likely to be gay" in our year, and stuff like that. I grew up in a family that wasn't homophobic at all but I'd visit friends whose families were. I didn't understand it, and it used to break my heart because I was brought up so differently. My mum had gay friends and my aunty was gay. It was just how it was. But I remember as a child, sitting at a friend's dinner table and something came up about someone being gay and his dad said, "All those gays should be shot!" I was only about ten years old and I just couldn't believe it.

You've suffered in the past from anxiety and depression. How have you dealt with that?
I've struggled on and off with mental health for quite some time. Substance abuse and addiction have played a huge part in my story as well but I've been sober now for over four years. I think it's important to talk about the elephant in the room because otherwise it can be so isolating. As the saying goes, "It's okay not to be okay". In fact, it's okay to feel shit sometimes! I was diagnosed with ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] and it's been good to have that diagnosis because I can now take care of it.

Does being a creative singer-songwriter help?
Being creative has been a godsend and a huge outlet for my mental health. But I also had to learn about anxiety; when I have a panic attack I'm not actually dying. I've even performed on stage while having a panic attack but I now understand that when it happens and my heart is racing it's just anxiety. I can still get it but it no longer runs my life. I know it'll pass and I just have to ride it out. In a way you almost have to embrace it rather than resist. Hindsight can be a bitch!

What's been your career highlight so far?
In 2018 I went to the United States and played in Nashville. I'd never really been overseas, except for New Zealand, but being able to take my music there… what an incredible experience!

What quote do you live by?
"Just for today!"

Have you ever had an on-stage wardrobe malfunction?
Sometimes when performing I wear really tight jeans and I have a habit of leaving my wallet in the back pocket. It's been pointed out to me, and I've seen the photos, that one of my arse cheeks looks a lot bigger than the other! Now I make a conscious effort to take my wallet out beforehand.

Briefs, boxers or free balling?
I wear boxers to bed and briefs under my jeans. Boxers are a bit too clunky inside jeans.

MORE: Thomas Keating's debut solo album That Old Eye In My Mind is out now.

If you are suffering anxiety or depression, support is available at:
Lifeline Australia: 131114 or Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

IF YOU WERE GAY, WHO'D BE YOUR CRUSH?

Thomas: Ryan Gosling. Especially when he did *La La Land*. He's super cool and very goodlooking.

COVER SHOOT CONFIDENTIAL

FORDHAM
ATHLETICS
BOX

Ryan Daharsh at 38
shot by Jade Young.

This month, our cover celebrates a reinvigorated USA and is special for a variety of reasons...

Firstly, our model is Ryan Daharsh, who previously appeared on the cover of DNA #114, (11 years ago in July, 2009) with fellow model, Rob Decato, shot by Kevin McDermott.

“I was 27,” recalls Ryan. “Around that time I was also on the cover of *Blue*. Lewis Peyton took some very flattering images that really helped my career. I was also contracted with American Eagle at the time – an awesome company to work with, always shooting at really fun locations.”

Since then, Ryan’s grown up, married and started a family. “Yeah, in 2010 I moved back to Nebraska. I wanted to take a break from the jet-set lifestyle and get back to the outdoors and being around family. My goal was to start a family. It took a few years but my wife and I now have three kids.”

Ryan will also be featured in an up-coming Netflix documentary series, yet to be named, looking at the fashion industry of the ’90s and 2000s. “It deals with the company Abercrombie and Fitch,” says Ryan. “I shot numerous campaigns for them on top of other campaigns over my career, so I’ve been interviewed about my experiences for the documentary.”

He may now be a dad, but his is no “dad bod”. Ryan laughs, “Well, thank you. When I was younger it seemed like all I did was train. These days I don’t train nearly as much, I train a lot smarter. I know how to get the most out of my body with the least amount of time and energy.”

DNA
#114
the travel issue
come away with us...

Ryan at 27 shot by Kevin McDermott for DNA #114.

Also significant this issue is that the photography is by Jade Young, an Asian-American woman based in New York. Regular DNA readers will already know and love her work, but the backstory in the months leading up to the shoot are shocking.

Because of COVID-19, Jade began experiencing racism at a level she had not previously encountered. “I had random people spit at me, tell me to go back to China, and call me ch*nk,” she reveals. These incidents occurred in cosmopolitan New York, where the “melting pot” of cultures is what New York is famous for.

“I wasn’t that surprised because Donald Trump had been fanning the flames of anti-Asian sentiment,” says Jade. “With his ‘China virus’ talk he angered and divided people. He missed an opportunity to bring the world closer together in fighting a global pandemic.

“When you hear him blame Asians 24/7, it doesn’t surprise me that people were brainwashed to hate. The level of vitriol was something I haven’t experienced before. The President has the loudest voice and sets the tone for the rest of the country.”

> “The all-American jock, on the cover of a gay magazine, shot by a woman of colour.

Things worsened when Jade was physically assaulted. “It was the first time someone had actually hit me,” she says. “He walked past me then punched me in the back of the head.”

The assault is currently being investigated by police, but has left Jade, as a woman of colour, feeling less safe in her own neighbourhood.

“This past year has been the most unsafe I’ve ever felt. In New York there’s been a confluence of poverty-based street crime and brutality against peaceful citizens protesting for racial equality.”

Jade believes, however, that America will be able to move past the legacy of “Trumpism”. “America is a country full of amazing people. The talented, industrious, compassionate and passionate people are what make America resilient,” she says.

Ryan agrees that it’s, “the people who will bring back the good times! I don’t think there’s any other way but to be optimistic,” he says.

“I’m very optimistic that the Biden–Harris White House can use their voice and experience to promote peace and equality,” says Jade. “My wish is for them to make America an example and a beacon of hope for the world.”

Is Ryan surprised, at 38, to be on the cover again? “I’m as surprised as you are,” he laughs. “When I left modelling, it was to be for good. I never saw myself on a cover again, let alone DNA. I’m super-stoked. Thankyou so much! It’s very cool”

As is being older, he says. “What I like most about being my age is the honesty; the ability to be honest with people and myself whether anyone likes it or not. I’m just me.”

This month, DNA celebrates the best of what the USA can be: inclusive, progressive, open-minded and diverse. The all-American jock, on the cover of a gay magazine, shot by a woman of colour.

Welcome to 2021.

//baskit/

A BRAND NEW DAY IN THE USA

Trump has lost, but what will a Biden-Harris White House mean for LGBTIQA+ Americans and the wider global community? Andrew M Potts reports.

SHUTTERSTOCK

The 2020 US election will be remembered for dividing the nation, but also for the diversity reflected in the outcome.

Pro-LGBTIQA+ equality candidates have won a majority in the House Of Representatives and the number of openly gay or lesbian federal lawmakers has risen from nine to at least 11 with a possible two more on their way.

Mondaire Jones and Ritchie Torres, both from New York State, have become the first two gay black men elected to Congress and only the second and third gay persons of colour elected to the US Capitol building. They were part of a field of 26 openly LGBTIQA+ plus people who ran for the House and Senate this year.

LGBTQ Victory Fund president Annise Parker welcomed the pair's election, saying, "Mondaire and Ritchie have shattered a rainbow ceiling and will bring unique perspectives based on lived experiences never before represented in the US Congress.

"As our nation grapples with racism, police brutality and a pandemic that disproportionally affects people of colour and LGBTQ people, these are the voices that can pull us from the brink and toward a more united and fair society."

The Victory Fund has also called on California Governor, Gavin Newsom to fill a Democratic Senate vacancy with an openly LGBTIQA+ person, while another House seat is still too close to call.

All eyes now look to Georgia where a run-off election in early January will decide the final two seats in the Senate and whether the Democrats can achieve a majority in both houses that will allow them to push through their agenda unhindered.

If they don't, we are guaranteed four more years of obstruction from Republican lawmakers, though President Biden should still be able to achieve a lot through the issuing of executive orders, like his predecessor Donald Trump did.

Either way, given the Republicans' conduct during the Obama and Trump administrations, in which they tore up the rule book of previously agreed bipartisan norms, the Democrats have no reason to play nice with the Republicans going forward.

Both President-Elect Joe Biden and his Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris gave LGBTIQA+ issues prominence in their campaigns, with Harris picked to strengthen the ticket's appeal with gay voters, and they have pledged to pass the Equality Act banning workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity within their first hundred days in office.

Harris has promised to establish a dedicated White House office of Chief Advocate For LGBTIQA+ Affairs.

Biden won praise from leading US LGBTIQA+ rights group the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) for his Harris as his VP.

"Senator Kamala Harris is nothing short of an exceptional choice for Vice President," HRC President, Alphonso David said. "Throughout her ground-breaking career, Senator Harris has been an outspoken advocate for the LGBTQ community, standing with us when many, even sometimes those within her own party, did not.

"It's clear the Biden-Harris ticket marks our nation's most pro-equality ticket in history."

Despite this praise, some activists thought neither candidate perfect enough, and some have been dismissive of what might be achieved under a Biden presidency. The Trump campaign eagerly seized on this criticism, even creating a dedicated LGBTIQA+ portal on their campaign website to trash Joe Biden's long record in politics.

But what are the true records of the next occupants of the White House? >>

>> BIDEN'S RECORD

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr, a former public defender, was elected to the Senate in 1972 aged just 29, making him the sixth-youngest Senator in US history.

Over his five decades in politics, Biden has been the kind of cautious moderate who is inclined to follow popular opinion rather than leading it, and he routinely received around 60 per cent of the vote in his home state of Delaware over the six times he was re-elected as a senator.

During his first year in the Senate, Biden was put on the spot by a gay activist at a public meeting who asked him what his position on gays serving in the military and as public servants was. He admitted it was not an issue he had given thought to, but said, "My gut reaction is that they are security risks," suggesting that they should be barred from such positions because they could be vulnerable to blackmail.

> “As President, I will continue standing with you to build a more equal, more inclusive United States, where every member of the LGBTQ+ community is safe and respected.

In context, this was 1973, when homosexuality had only just been legalised in Delaware and was still illegal in the vast majority of US states and would not be decriminalised nationwide by the Supreme Court until 2003.

By the late '70s, Biden was being talked about as a likely future Democratic presidential contender. He first threw his hat into the ring in 1987 but withdrew from the Democratic primary contest after just three months over a plagiarism scandal where it was revealed that he had borrowed from speeches by other politicians without attributing them, as well as exaggerating some of his early achievements.

In 1993 Biden was one of 34 Democrats who voted in favour of a Republican bill that cemented an existing prohibition on the entry of people with HIV into the United States into law. Only one Republican and 22 Democrats voted against the bill. This policy would remain in place until it was reversed by President Barack Obama in 2009.

That same year he also voted in favour of the Clinton White House's so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military as long as they stayed in the closet at work. In return, the Defence Department would not actively seek to root them out.

WIKI COMMONS

Supported by gay activists at the time as a step forward, none the less over 14,000 US service members were fired under the policy after being outed at work until it was ended by the Obama Administration in 2011.

Biden supported the Senate confirmation of Roberta Achtenberg as Assistant Secretary For Fair Housing And Equal Opportunity At The Department Of Housing And Urban Development – she was the first openly gay or lesbian person to be appointed to such a high role in government.

Other bills he supported in 1993 allowed the District Of Columbia to create domestic partnerships for gay and straight unmarried couples, created the first federal hate crimes legislation protecting people on the basis of sexual orientation, and he helped pass a $5.5 billion health funding package which included significant funding for efforts to find a cure for HIV.

But Biden disappointed the following year when he voted in favour of a bill to strip federal funding for schools that "carry out a program or activity that has either the purpose or effect of encouraging or supporting homosexuality as a positive lifestyle".

Two years later he voted for the Defense Of Marriage Act (DOMA) which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman under federal law for the first time. Put forward by Republicans, a majority of Democratic senators also supported the bill and President Bill Clinton signed it into law.

Bill Clinton would later claim that Democrats only supported the law so as to remove the Republicans' impetus to seek a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage that would be harder to undo, but activists have disputed that, noting that 1996 was an election year.

Even so, two years later, Vicki Morelli, a board member of Delaware Pride, told a newspaper that, “Biden has usually been pro-gay about 80 percent of the time,” in his voting record, while complaining that he was often silent on their issues – whereas the Republicans were outspoken in both being against them and voting against them “90 percent of the time”.

> Biden was responsible for forcing Obama’s hand when he gave an interview in May of 2012 confirmed his personal support for same-sex marriage.

LGBTQI IN THE USA
(Left to right) Mondaire Jones, Congressman. Ritchie Torres, Congressman. Karine Jean-Pierre, Deputy Press Secretary. Pete Buttigieg, Biden-Harris transition team. Sarah McBride, trans Senator.

WIKI COMMONS / SHUTTERSTOCK / COURTESY THE CANDIDATE

Biden played it safe through the early 2000s, as did many other moderate Democrats, by saying he opposed same-sex marriage while supporting civil unions and the issue being left to the states to decide. He also opposed a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage that Republicans were pushing for, but argued that was because DOMA had already made it unnecessary, telling NBC’s *Meet The Press*, “Why do we need a constitutional amendment? Marriage is between a man and a woman,” in 2006.

In 2008 he made a bid to become the Democratic nominee for president, supporting civil unions with the same rights as marriage.

Biden was chosen by the Obama team as the vice-presidential nominee for his experience heading the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, his support among older, Catholic and working-class voters, and because they felt he would be scandal free, having already survived the media scrutiny of the Democratic primary process.

The first Obama-Biden White House saw significant progress on LGBTI rights, which had stagnated during the presidency of George Bush Jr, with major achievements including the Matthew Shepard And James Byrd Jr Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act of 2010, and from February of 2011 the Obama Administration announced that the US government’s lawyers would no longer defend the Defence Of Marriage Act in court.

Obama also tried to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, legislation that would ban employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation by employers with more than 15 employees which had languished in Congress since 1994. The legislation passed the Senate and would have been signed by Obama but it was blocked by Republicans in the House Of Representatives.

Towards the end of the first term of Obama’s presidency, there was chatter that the White House was seeking a way to “evolve” to support same-sex marriage as official policy and that Obama and Biden had personally been supportive on the issue behind closed doors for years.

During the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, Biden claimed to have been the “first person to go on national television in any administration and say I supported gay marriage… and so it started a ripple effect,” but that was not correct.

Republican Dick Chaney had come out in support of same-sex marriage as early as 2000 during a vice-presidential debate, and many leading Democrats including senators John Kerry and Nancy Pelosi had been openly supportive since the ’90s. However, Biden was responsible for forcing Obama’s hand when he gave an interview to NBC in May of 2012 in which he finally confirmed his personal support for same-sex marriage.

“It’s a simple proposition,” Biden told *Meet The Press* host David Gregory, “Who do you love? And will you be loyal to the person you love? I am absolutely comfortable with… men marrying men, women marrying women.”

He’d jumped Obama’s gun. Just days later an embarrassed Obama followed suit, telling *Good Morning America*, “I had already made a decision that we were going to probably take this position before the election and before the [Democratic National] Convention. [Joe Biden] probably got out a little bit over his skis, but out of generosity of spirit.”

Obama added he would have “preferred to have done this in my own way, on my own terms [but] all’s well that ends well.”

When the US Supreme Court finally ruled to bring marriage equality to all 50 states in June of 2015, the Obama-Biden White House celebrated by lighting the exterior of the building in rainbow colours.

Biden and Obama showed unprecedented leadership just over a year later, visiting the site of the Pulse nightclub massacre four days after 49 mostly LGBTIQ people were gunned down. It is usual for the President or the Vice-President to attend the site of such a tragedy but for both to attend together showed a special concern.

“Today, once again, as has been true too many times before, I held and hugged grieving family members and parents, and they asked, why does this keep happening?” Obama said in Orlando in 2016, “And they pleaded that we do more to stop the carnage.

“They don’t care about the politics. Neither do I. Neither does Joe. And neither should any parent out there who’s thinking about their kids being not in the wrong place, but in places where kids are supposed to be.”

Biden recalled the shooting again on its anniversary earlier this year. “All these years later, terrorism, mass shootings, and hate crimes continue to rip apart our American communities,” Biden said in June. “Our places of worship have been attacked, Hispanics have been targeted in places like El Paso, the death toll from mass shootings continues to mount, and LGBTQ+ people, particularly transgender women of colour, are disproportionately targeted by violence.

“As President, I will continue standing with you to build a more equal, more inclusive United States, where every member of the LGBTQ+ community is safe and respected.”

One aspect of Biden that has been used against him by Trump supporters in the recent presidential campaign has been his notorious handsy-ness. He is known as a back slapper and a hair sniffer and a number of women have complained about unwanted non-sexual touching by Biden. Only one, Tara Reade, has accused him of sexual assault.

Reade made a complaint about Biden to the Senate human resources office in 1993 in

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>> which she alleged that Biden had made her feel uncomfortable in the workplace, but it took 27 years and two Democratic primaries for her to add a sexual element to the story and she has a record of making false statements, including lying under oath and in court proceedings, that bring her story into doubt.

Biden has vehemently denied Reade's allegation but has acknowledged he needs to be more mindful of others' personal space.

In comparison, Donald Trump has been accused of rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment by at least 25 women since the 1970s.

HARRIS' RECORD

Kamala Harris has a much shorter record on LGBTI rights compared to Biden, having only served in elected roles since 2004 when she became the District Attorney of San Francisco and most of her criticisms stem from her time as a government lawyer, not as a Senator – a role she has only occupied since 2017.

Harris was hired as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County in 1990 soon after passing the California bar exam, then was recruited as an assistant district attorney for the city of San Francisco in 1998 where she became the Chief Prosecutor of the Career Criminal Division, prosecuting homicide, robbery and sexual assault cases.

> “
> In 2004, Harris spent Valentine's Day performing weddings for gay and lesbian couples.

WIKI COMMONS

Two years later she went to work for San Francisco City Hall, running its Family And Children's Services Division, then began campaigning to be elected the city's District Attorney, which she won after a run-off election in 2004 becoming the first person of colour to occupy that role.

Under Harris' leadership as DA, the felony conviction rate in San Francisco rose from 50 percent to 76 percent, and drug dealing convictions rose from 56 percent to 74 percent.

During a brief one-month window in which San Francisco's then Democratic mayor, Gavin Newsom directed city officials to start issuing marriage licences to same-sex couples in 2004, Harris spent Valentine's Day performing weddings for gay and lesbian couples.

However, her tenure as District Attorney was also marred by the wrongful conviction of Jamal Trulove, a black man who was framed by San Francisco police officers for murder, a mistake that cost the city over $13 million dollars when it finally settled the case last year.

Harris then stood for election as Attorney General of California and was sworn into office in January of 2011, becoming the first woman and person of colour to hold that position. As Attorney General, Harris refused to defend California's Prop 8 ban on same-sex marriage in court, and in 2013 she filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court arguing that the law was unconstitutional.

When the court threw out the case in June that year, Harris urged the Ninth Circuit Court Of Appeals to lift its stay on same-sex couples marrying, which it did, and gay and lesbian Californians began marrying again. Harris officiated over the marriage of the plaintiffs in the case, Kristin Perry and Sandra Stier, the very same day.

The following year, Harris co-sponsored legislation to ban the use of gay and transgender panic defences in court which, when passed, made California the first US state to pass such a ban.

However, when trans woman Michelle-Lael Norsworthy filed a lawsuit after she was denied sex reassignment surgery while incarcerated in a state prison, Harris appealed the case on behalf of the California Department Of Corrections And Rehabilitation.

“There is no evidence that Norsworthy is in serious, immediate physical or emotional danger,” Harris wrote to the court in seeking a stay of its decision. “Norsworthy has been receiving hormone therapy for her gender dysphoria since 2000, and continues to receive hormone therapy and other forms of treatment.”

It has been estimated that this legal action cost the state of California more in legal fees than it would have cost to have simply provided Norsworthy with the medical procedure she had asked for.

However, as the top lawyer for the state of California, there is no evidence that Harris was doing anything more than the will of her client in this case.

This incident has been considered a black mark against Harris by some activists who

> “Harris and Biden have been proactive in promoting LGBTQIA+ people to prominent roles in the new administration.

ADOBE STOCK

The White House goes rainbow after the Obama-Biden win for same-sex marriage.

also cite her support for legislation restricting the ability of sex workers to advertise online as actions that have harmed trans people.

“By opposing health care for trans prisoners and aggressively supporting criminalisation of sex work, Harris’ work has contributed to some of the most violent conditions faced by trans people, particularly trans women of colour,” one prominent activist wrote during Harris’ primary bid last year.

“If your job [as a prosecutor] requires that you destroy the lives of young black and brown people, then maybe you need to re-evaluate your life choices or do your job differently,” said another.

But these criticisms seem to stem out of a wider anti-capitalist and anti-policing agenda that has grown to prominence in the American far-left in recent years, and they were made against Harris when it was hoped that the Democrats might still pick a more progressive candidate like Bernie Sanders to lead the party against Trump in the election.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM A BIDEN-HARRIS PRESIDENCY?

Since Biden won the nomination, progressives have largely fallen in line between Joe and Kamala to present a united front against Trump and Republicans – something that appears to have paid off.

For her part, Harris says she now supports the decriminalisation of sex work and wants to wind back the war on drugs, while reversing Trump’s ban on transgender people serving in the military has been a stated priority for both Harris and Biden. Passing the Equality Act will be another.

While it’s still early days, both Harris and Biden have been proactive in promoting LGBTQIA+ people to prominent roles in the new administration.

Former South Bend Mayor and presidential contender Pete Buttigieg was quickly announced as a member of the Biden-Harris transitional team and many expect he will be given a cabinet position – quite possibly Secretary Of The Department Of Veterans Affairs given that he is himself a veteran.

Biden has named openly gay man Carlos Elizondo as the Social Secretary for his White House. Elizondo previously worked for Biden in a similar role for all eight years of his vice-presidency.

And Harris has named Karine Jean-Pierre, a Black, lesbian political activist as her Chief Of Staff. Other prominent appointments are sure in the weeks to come.

The Biden White House is also likely to revive a trend established by the Obama Administration of appointing openly gay diplomats to represent America and its values around the world – and often to countries that are mulling our legal rights issues. A good example of this was when Obama appointed John Berry, a married gay man, as the US ambassador to Australia in 2013 as the country was in the middle of a long and drawn out culture war over marriage equality.

America’s foes like Russia and Turkey will probably label this more “evidence” of the decadence of a corrupt West but it could go a long way to normalising LGBTQIA+ people in prominent roles in the eyes of the public in Asia and Eastern Europe where more progress is likely in the decade to come.

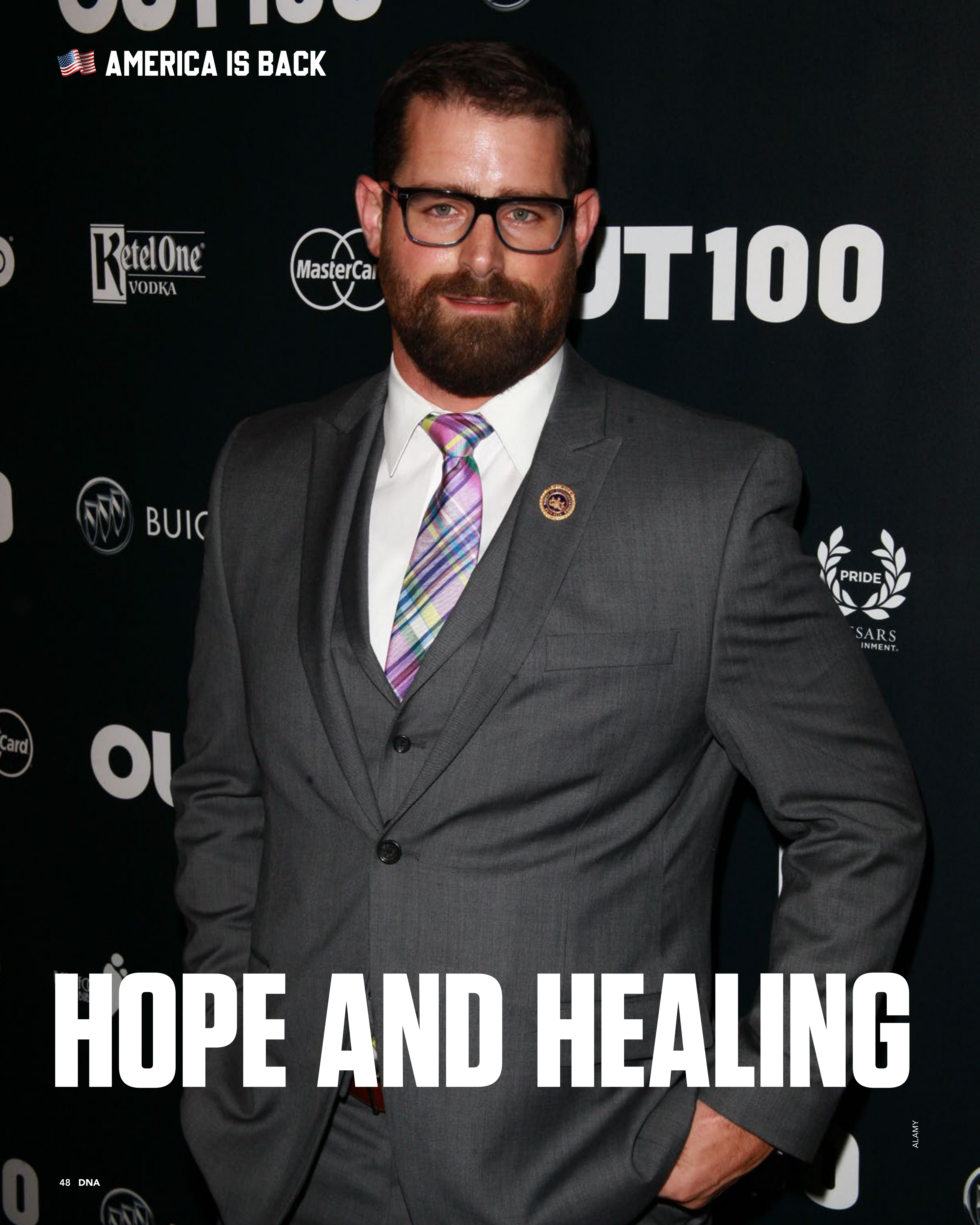
By comparison, Trump appointed just one gay diplomat during his administration, Richard Grenell, an openly gay Trump supporting conservative who lasted just two years in the role.

Grenell was supposed to have led a Trump Administration diplomatic effort to end the criminalisation of homosexuality around the world, but it’s difficult to identify any tangible achievements from that.

Finally, it’s worth addressing erroneous claims that Trump increased his support among gay voters at the 2020 election. It is true that gay voters turned out for Trump in greater numbers than in 2016 but, as a percentage, a greater number still voted for Biden and the Democrats.

This was an election with historic levels of voter participation in a country without compulsory voting and where early and mail-in voting made it easier to participate than ever before. Both sides knew the stakes were high and both sides recorded record voter turnout among all groups.

This election was not at all an endorsement of Trump by cis white gay men and those that did, did largely over economic issues and the perceived management of the economy, not because of their sexual orientation. •



HOPE AND HEALING

ALAMY

The first openly gay member of the Pennsylvania House Of Representatives, Brian Sims is the sexy face of a new generation of LGBTIQ politicians and believes the darkness of the Trump era has given rise to a new awareness that will bring positive changes to the USA.

He discusses disinformation, and why racism is the issue at the heart of all civil rights reforms. Interview by Conall Ferguson.

Brian Sims sharing on social media.

DNA: Congratulations, the USA has a new President-Elect, Democrat Joe Biden. How does that feel?
Brian Sims: Hopeful. Which has been a very foreign feeling for me and many Americans.
What can LGBTQIA+ American's look forward to from a Biden administration?
There are two things we *know* we can look forward to and perhaps several things we can guess about. The two we know about are an administration that will use every available opportunity to be inclusive of LGBTQ people and our rights, which is the opposite of what we've seen these last four years. And we can look forward to an administration that will work proactively with congress to finally enact LGBTQ protections that are nationwide.

> “ LGBTQ people have a level of empathy and resilience that is very effective in government.

Pennsylvania flipped back to blue this election. Did you find that surprising?
I definitely didn't for a couple of reasons. One is that there are about a million more Democrats in Pennsylvania than Republicans and, frankly, there were during the 2016 election as well. And I've had a lot of opportunities over the last four years to see how Pennsylvanians have been impacted by Donald Trump and to see how Pennsylvanians vote so, no, I wasn't surprised at all to see that Joe Biden won Pennsylvania by about twice the margin that Trump won it back in 2016.

Politics feels like it's operating at a very low common denominator. Things are so polarised, there's a lot of misinformation, and we have a US president trying to undermine election results, alleging voter fraud with no actual evidence. Do you find yourself worried about the state of modern democracy?
Anybody who isn't worried, to some degree, about the state of democracy, especially American democracy, isn't paying attention. I have a lot of worries, a lot of concerns, but I have a level of optimism that is rooted in reality. More women, more people of colour, more second-generation immigrants, and more LGBTQ people ran for public office last year than at any time in American history. My life experience, social science and political science tell us that when those people are better represented in government, government behaves better. So, perhaps one of the by-products of this awful time in politics has been the engagement of underrepresented, under-engaged people, who happen to have really strong proclivities and quantifiable strengths at representative democracy. So, yeah, this time has been terrible but it has created a groundswell of engagement that won't go away any time soon.
Indeed. We saw the “Rainbow Wave” of newly elected LGBTIQ politicians; people like Sarah McBride in Delaware, Shevrin Jones in Florida, Adrian Tam in Hawaii. How important is it to have LGBTIQ representation and visibility in modern politics?
It's incredibly important. Representative democracy mandates that among the people who represent the masses are people *from* the masses, and if LGBTQ people are going to exist in this world, which we do, we deserve to exist in representative democracies. But, more important than that, the data tells us that people of marginalised backgrounds often experience significantly greater developments of empathy, and empathy turns out to be particularly useful in representative democracies. So while there are far too many >>

>> negative ramifications of bigotry, homophobia, transphobia, one of the positive ramifications is that it builds among us LGBTQ people a level of empathy and resilience that is very effective in government.

Empathy seems like something that was lacking from the Trump administration. Did you feel that?

I did. People who have never *had* to overcome anything don't know *how* to overcome anything. We saw that with this previous administration: the rampant exaggeration of privilege gives us people who do not understand how to be successful in the face of hardship. It's part of the reason why America has begun to understand why black and brown voices, why trans voices are so powerful. It's not simply because they exist, it's because there is so much to be learned from individuals who are able to thrive despite negativity from people around them.

> We're in an era where people are really *really* ill-informed but very aggressive about what they believe…

Some exit polls, including one by *The New York Times*, showed that the percentage of LGBTQ people who voted for Trump had doubled from around 14 to 28 per cent. What do you make of that figure?

They're wrong! The William's Institute out of UCLA has given us updated figures that are more accurate, I believe. They remind us that, yes, somewhere between 10 and 15 per cent of LGBT people vote for a party that doesn't support our equality, but Trump did not grow his LGBT base. If there's anything we've learned this year it's that polling is simply no longer accurate in the modern political era.

We all remember how the polling was so wide of the mark in the 2016 elections…

Of course! I believe in political science, in math and data and numbers and trends so I don't say it lightly but political polling in 2020 turned out to be more about playing to the awful sports nature of politics and not playing to the science of politics.

Trump still managed to appeal to a massive number of voters. What do you think the root of that appeal is – racism and xenophobia, disenfranchisement, misinformation?

It's a mix of all of those things, which was a part of the reason he was able to grow his voter base by millions. While Joe Biden was decisively the winner of the election, there's no question that Donald Trump received more votes than he did in his last election.

The reason the Trump era was so dangerous was because Trump spoke, and continues to speak, to racists, to xenophobes in the language of white supremacy. To the American "gun-damentalists", the second amendment "ammo-sexuals", Trump was someone whose values were malleable enough to be pushed into a place where he wasn't going to attack guns, which he didn't. Unfortunately, during the Trump era, the number of people killed by guns continued to rise when it didn't need to.

Also, we can't underestimate the populist appeal Trump had for people who are just sick of the system. There are people who would rather have a sort of Bolshevik Revolution – burn it all to the ground and see what grows and maybe I'll benefit from that. Rationally speaking, there aren't any Republican Party policies that benefit anybody unless you're making almost a quarter-of-a-million dollars in the United States.

Yet there are people voting for the Republicans who make far less than that, so what's the appeal?

The appeal is someone who proclaims to have a common enemy, somebody who uses the same language of sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, transphobia. That was all very useful for Donald Trump. He doesn't have a base, he has multiple bases and a lot of people found something in Donald Trump that they enjoyed – even if that was just that he was nasty to the people they didn't like.

It seems we've lost the ability to listen to one another. How do we can start to engage with each other in a meaningful way again?

One of the big problems of having so much information so readily available is that all of us feel that, at the touch of a button, we can prove that we are right. Therefore, we don't have to be right anymore. We don't have to have the evidence of our correctness readily available and that, of course, is very problematic. It puts us in this era in which we have people are really really ill-informed but very very aggressive about what they believe and why they believe it. We all have people around us who we disagree with and we either find other things to agree about or we simply avoid those things that we disagree about, and that's all very possible.

We are seeing more politically engaged people than there has ever been, certainly in my lifetime. I'm a civil rights attorney who got mad at my government and ran for office. Now there are more people who were angry about an issue, who were wronged in some way, and recognised that they could make changes so that others wouldn't be wronged. I think we're taking the steps already, and the divisiveness, the angriness and nastiness is the cold dying hand of an era that needed to die away.

> A lot of people found something in Donald Trump that they enjoyed – that he was nasty to the people they didn't like.

You've mentioned the information age in which we live, and you're an avid user of social media. How much do you think technology and social media have changed the political landscape?

We can't overestimate the impact it's had. A candidate being able to get messages directly to a potential voter, no longer having to use mass media to get messages across, is a massive sea change. In removing the middleman of professional journalism and

Brian promotes masking up.

news in information exchange, we have caused ourselves irreparable harm. Well, hopefully not irreparable.

We could spend months debating whether it's hurt us more than it's helped us but it's certainly hurt us in allowing this era of mass disinformation. I read recently that upwards of two-thirds of Donald Trump voters believe there was active fraud that defrauded him of the presidency, even though there has never been any evidence of that. And the people proclaiming that lack of evidence are certainly bipartisan, not simply Democrats. So, yeah, would we be in the disinformation age we're in now were it not for social media? Highly unlikely.

> ❝
> Between 10 and 15 per cent of LGBT people vote for a party that doesn't support our equality…

People are always seeking to know more about the personal life of their politicians; do you feel that pressure to share more and more about yourself and your life?

I do and it's something I think about proactively. In part that's because of the way I do my job. The way I ask for support to do this job is very publicly. I was the first openly LGBTQ person to serve on our legislature and, for a number of people, simply *knowing* that there was a gay person there was different than *seeing* that there was a gay person there. I'm very proud that I've been able to expose what it's like to be an LGBTQ person in government to lots of people who didn't know what that was like. I would do myself an injustice if I didn't also show who I am at my best and my worst. It's important for people to understand, yes, I'm a gay man but also, you know, I date, and I have a fun dog, and there are restaurants I love. I think those things just like everybody else who uses social media. Some of it is intended to show people who we are in our more private moments, and some of it is intended to show people who we are when we want to be loud and proud.

You're the Democratic Chair for the Subcommittee On Mental Health. LGBTQ people, especially youth, are at higher risk from mental health issues, and the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the problem. How do we go about tackling this?

That's such a huge question. One of the ways in which the global LGBTQ community has taken advantage of the digital era is our interconnectivity. That's how we have built our political power and our social power. And by that I mean the power to just exist and feel safe in some places. That's all been put massively at risk by the pandemic. Our community, and LGBTQ youth especially, happen to have one of the better tools for success in all of that, and that's the ability to look outside of their immediate family members for support, love, guidance and family. We often get to choose our families and for the longest time that was very representative of the fact that we lost our families when we came out. But we've grown beyond that in many cases and the LGBTQ family is very expansive.

So I understand why isolation is so dangerous for all people but especially for LGBTQ youth. But we happen to be good at reaching out, at finding support, at finding family, so we need to encourage that.

We simply cannot allow for all of us to be intermingling socially again for quite some time; we can't be around one another. We have to do the things we know will alleviate stress, to minimise trauma, to support healthy behaviours, and that's interacting with one another. While we all have a gripe about FaceTime and Zoom, they still beat the alternative, which is nothing. Everything we can do to reach out to our friends and family right now is the right thing to do and a healthy thing to do.

Visibility is the key to onging success, says Brian.

What would you say is the most pressing issue facing LGBTIQ Americans right now?

Oh, there's one that dominates all others and that's systematic racism. Until we are able to fully head-on tackle the racism in our criminal justice system, in education, in finance, in government… until we are able to address those things in the way that we began to 50 years ago, I'm afraid nothing we do for the larger LGBTQ population will have any staying power or any true buoyancy. There's simply no room for the advancement of LGBTQ rights in spaces that allow for racism.

2020 was an extremely difficult year. Who or what kept you motivated?

I've been most inspired by the quality of candidates who stepped up in 2020 to run for office, to proclaim their values, to fight for a better tomorrow, to stand against all that we've been seeing from our federal government. As awful as 2020 will ever be, it will also be a reminder about what courage looks like. More people who haven't been represented in government ran for representative government positions this last cycle than any time in US history. Candidates of the last four years are people who looked around and realised their demands were falling on deaf ears and that therefore they needed to step up and make change. Sarah McBride is a perfect example. It gives me hope knowing that our politics for the next 20, 30, 40 years will involve the politicians born of this era.

> ❝
> People who have never *had* to overcome anything don't know *how* to overcome anything.

If you could give this new wave of LGBTQ politicians and activists one piece of advice, what would it be?

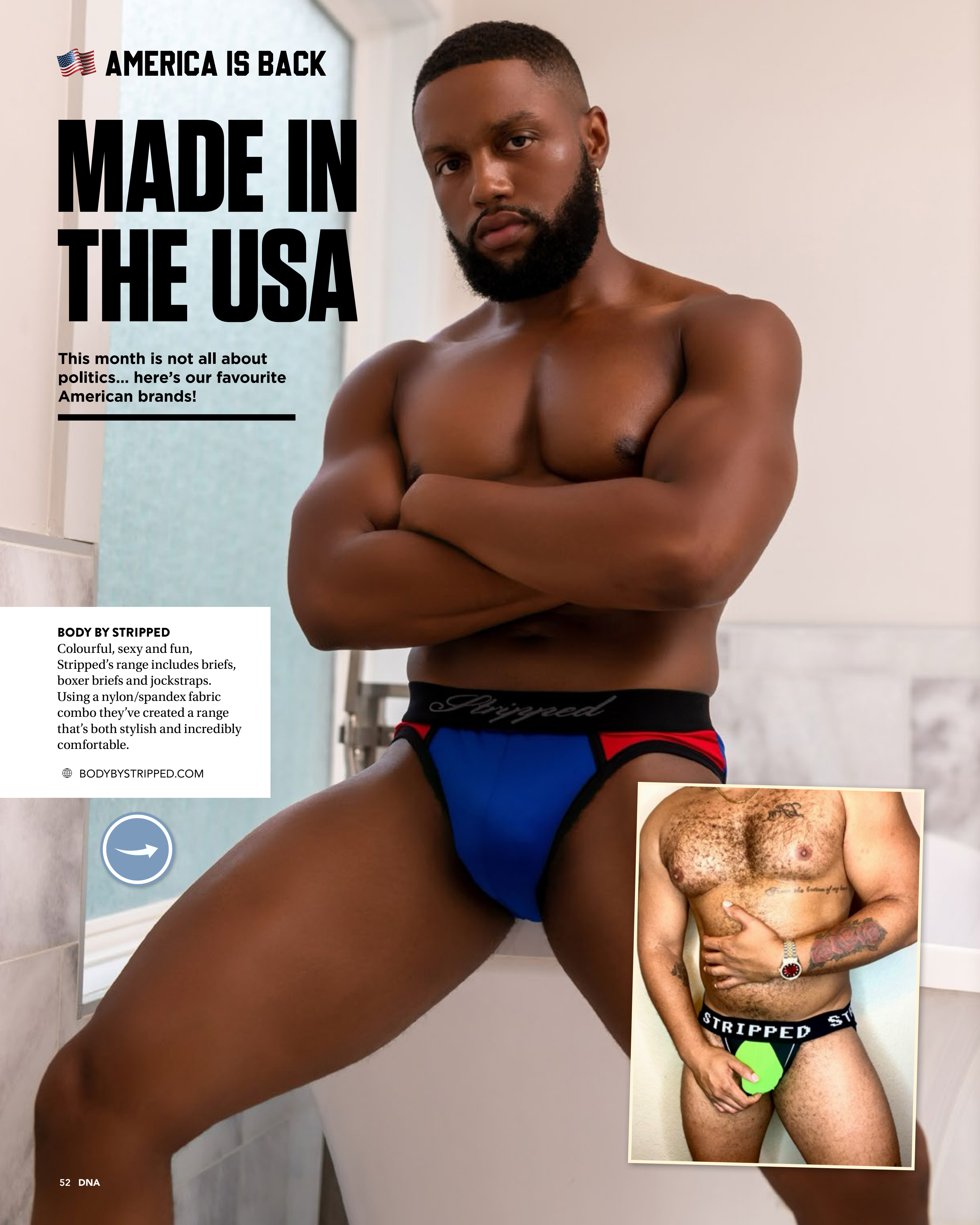
Americans may not know what they want in politics anymore but they know what they don't want; they don't want inauthenticity. Don't fake it. Don't fake your beliefs. Challenge them, allow them to be challenged, test them. Find information that supports the things you believe, and things that challenge the things you believe but, by all means, don't fake it. Authenticity is the name of the game for political success. •

MORE: Brian Sims is a Democrat, elected to the Pennsylvania House Of Representatives in 2012. He is the first openly gay representative elected in the state and was re-elected in 2018.

AMERICA IS BACK

MADE IN THE USA

This month is not all about politics… here's our favourite American brands!



BODY BY STRIPPED
Colourful, sexy and fun, Stripped's range includes briefs, boxer briefs and jockstraps. Using a nylon/spandex fabric combo they've created a range that's both stylish and incredibly comfortable.

BODYBYSTRIPPED.COM

BALDRICK BENJAMIN
Design partners Baldrick and Benjamin set out to create a range that blended fashion, design and luxury, and which accentuated the male form. Mission accomplished.

BALDRICKBENJAMIN.COM

JACK ADAMS
We love the confidence of this brand. It's active wear – so gym and sports friendly but, equally, wearable under jeans, suit pants or to party.

JACKADAMSUSA.COM

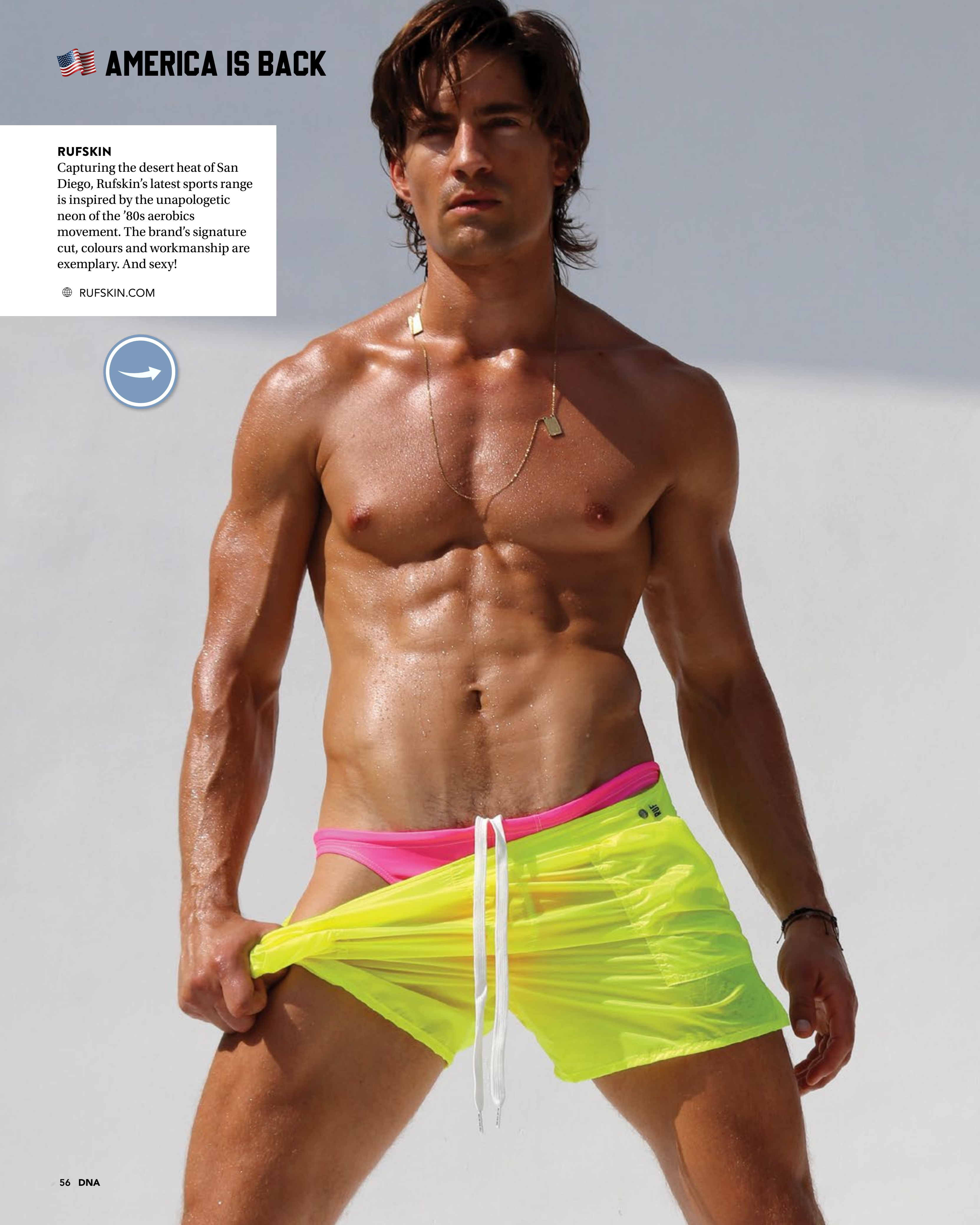
BANG!
Out of Miami, this range is defined by its “Perfect-Fit” tailored cuts that are designed to showcase the male body. Everything looks good in this gear and their soft cotton blends feel silky smooth against the skin.

BANGCLOTHES.COM

RICK MAJORS
This brand is all about feeling confident and projecting confidence. The fit, look and colour ways are all about saying, "Look at me and what I've got!"

INTERNATIONALJOCK.COM

AMERICA IS BACK



RUFSKIN
Capturing the desert heat of San Diego, Rufskin's latest sports range is inspired by the unapologetic neon of the '80s aerobics movement. The brand's signature cut, colours and workmanship are exemplary. And sexy!

RUFSKIN.COM

ROUNDERBUM
So, this brand kinda does what the name suggests! The gear wraps around your boys and makes them bigger, better, rounder. Yes, really boosting your… confidence!

ROUNDERBUM.COM

N2N BODYWEAR
Straight outta West Hollywood, this brand has been making eye-popping designs for the last 24 years and keeping go-go- boys, gym bunnies and the rest of us happy with their uninhibited, sexy gear.

N2NBODYWEAR.COM

Saoirse Ronan (left) and Kate Winslet in Ammonite.

Making Mary gay respects her, says director Francis Lee.

Francis (centre) with Josh O'Connor and Alec Secareanu making God's Own Country.

Francis Lee directing on the Ammonite set.

FINDING MARY

British director Francis Lee had a hit in 2017 with his first feature film, *God's Own Country*, a gay romance on the rugged Yorkshire moors.

It was popular with the critics, cinemagoers at large, and, of course, the gay community. At 48, it was the first film he directed and he also wrote the script. He'd been an actor and had some good roles but many of his credits were "solider at gate" and "shop assistant".

He's just made has second film, another gay romance, *Ammonite*, set in another forbidding location – the south English coast. The film stars Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan. Winslet plays Mary Anning, a single woman living with her ailing mother. She's a palaeontologist who digs up prehistoric shellfish, known as ammonites, which she sells for a living. She takes in a lodger, Charlotte Murchison (Ronan), dumped by her husband, who goes off to Europe. Slowly, the two women fall in love.

Francis Lee spoke to Ian Horner for DNA about both films.

DNA: *Ammonite* and *God's Own Country* have many parallels. Both couples live in worlds where the climate and the terrain are as harsh as the society and the people. In both cases, the intruder brings lessons in tenderness and affection. To what degree is this theme autobiographical for you?

Francis Lee: I've only directed two films, only written two, and they're both incredibly personal. I'm not sure if either is autobiographical but the themes are incredibly personal and resonate with my life.

How does your own coming out inform these two stories?

Honestly, my coming out was fairly dull. A non-event, and so long ago I barely remember it. I never struggled with my identity or sexuality in terms of being scared of who I was. Mind you, the inherent shame we queer people feel is something I still deal with daily. In terms of both these stories I was interested in looking at, not so much the issues and the problems around sexuality but, the issues and problems around relationships and how we navigate within these intimate human bonds.

What were you able to explore in a story about two women that you couldn't in the story of two men?

What's fascinating to me about *Ammonite* is its period [the 1840s] and the notions of sexuality back then. I read a lot around same-sex relationships, particularly female-female relationships, and discovered lots of female-female relationships were going on then, as they always do, and they were well documented with letters between women that described these really passionate, emotional, caring, loving relationships and it led me to research the period more.

Homosexuality wasn't classified until the late 19th Century and then only for men. At the time there was a notion among the medical profession that women didn't have sexual pleasure organs. There was this idea that women could have relationships and people wouldn't worry about it because there was no notion of women's sexuality. I found documented examples of married women living in the family home with their husband but in a bedroom down the corridor with a female who'd be referred to as a "companion" or "friend" while the husband would be in his bedroom on his own.

There was something about female sexuality in this period I was very drawn to. Society was incredibly patriarchal and women had to operate inside that.

The nudity in *God's Own Country* stripped away the artifice. Did you have any misgivings about shooting such an intimate lesbian story?

I have to recognise that I'm not a woman, obviously, and I don't know how much intimate experience I've had with the female form. I just put myself into the head of these two characters and I wrote that scene and was very rigorous in terms of [asking myself] does this tell us where these characters are emotionally? Do we understand the situation and their relationship better because of it? And I thought yes, we do. As soon as I started working with Kate and Saoirse we talked about this scene. We were very open and I listened a lot. They were heavily involved because of the relationship I'd built up with them in terms of trust and understanding. There was a wonderful three-way dialogue on why that scene was there, what was going on, how were we going to do it.

> “Both my films look at working class people in same-sex relationships. It's rare to see those people on screen. You have to fight for those stories.

Were the actors in both films at all hesitant about the nudity and sex scenes?
No. Because the scenes were in the script for very specific reasons. When somebody reads the script they go, "Okay, I understand why that's there, why it's important, what it tells us about the characters."

What do you hope a gay male audience will take away from *Ammonite*?
Gosh, I don't know. One of the strangest things about bringing out this film this year has been that I've never met an audience. I've never spoken to anybody who's seen it. The only people I've spoken to are wonderful journalists like yourself. I'm not sure what people are making of it or seeing in it.

What do you, as a gay man, take away from the story, that you didn't take into the film?
It taught me a lot about loneliness and about respecting characters you don't see on screen very often. Both my films look at working class people in same-sex relationships. It's very rare to see those people elevated onto a screen and respected like that and I learnt how important those stories are. You have to fight for those stories because there's still real pushback when you try to make them.

You chose to make Mary Anning gay even though there's little evidence that she was, and you copped some flak. But there was evidence of many influential women in her life. Did that play into your choice to make her lesbian?
Yes. There's no documentation whatsoever that Mary Anning ever had a relationship with a man, but there is documentation saying she had close female friends like Elizabeth Philpot (played by Fiona Shaw in the film). There's proof she and Charlotte were friends and that Charlotte went to stay with Mary and her husband left her there so she could work with her. In history, when there's no concrete proof either way, heterosexuality is just presumed.

There are a couple of fictionalised novels about Mary and one of them suggests she had a relationship with a man. No one complained about that book. It's super interesting that some people feel affronted about me giving Mary a same-sex relationship.

Of course, we've always lived in the shadows, being queer was illegal, so queer histories are rare and mostly undocumented. Queer people didn't really have children so there was no one to pass on their stories. I wanted to do something for Mary that would respect her and elevate and in such a patriarchal society where her work had been appropriated constantly by men who bought her fossils. I felt the quality and the respect would come from giving her a relationship with a woman.

Does the ammonite metaphor suggest Mary was trapped in a prehistoric shell?
Yes. Ammonites were vulnerable molluscs and to survive they built very hard shells around themselves and I guess that's what I was suggesting about Mary.

When you were an actor [*Heartbeat*, *Casualty*, *Midsomer Murders*] what did you learn that made you a better director?
First of all, I learned that I was a terrible actor and I should stop immediately. Second, I learned what it feels like to stand in front of a camera and feel vulnerable and how difficult it is to get to a position of relaxation and confidence to deliver a good performance. As a director I try to create the most comfortable, secure environment for actors to deliver their very best and I make sure the actors are constantly my top priority.

You shot chronologically, a luxury that must have meant some extra budget. What were the difficulties in the shoot, apart from the forbidding location?
The script was very long!

Well, that was your fault!
[Laughs] I only had seven weeks to shoot but I knew it was a 12-week shoot so that was a challenge but I'm pleased to say I never dropped a scene. We worked very quickly.

You used some of your *God's Own Country* actors again (Alec Secareanu, Gemma Jones, Sarah White, Liam Thomas). Why?
Because I love them and they're amazing. When you find people you love working with and their work is fantastic you don't let them go.

You've only made two films. Is there a third in your head?
Yeah, I've just written it.

Give us a tease.
No. But I can tell you it's a horror film.

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

Filmmaker Francis Lee was born in Soyland, a farming district in West Yorkshire where he set and shot this 2017 film, *God's Own Country*. Like his new film, *Ammonite*, it's a story of complicated, unfolding gay love.

Lee still lives there. It's his home and he's barely left. Yet he shows us a region that's cold and harsh, its people worn and wearied. It's more like hell. So, why the film's title?

Johnny (Josh O'Connor, currently *The Crown*'s Prince Charles) is a pragmatic young farmer who shags as hard as he drinks, waking up with a hangover and trudging out each morning to mend fences and tend sheep for his invalid father.

Romanian worker Gheorghe (Bucharest actor Alec Secareanu) signs on to help with lambing season and gradually shows Johnny there's more to love and sex than a quick root in the pub toilet.

As Johnny awakens to tenderness, the film's stark lighting gradually warms, the character emerges from hiding behind hoodies and thick jumpers. He hangs out naked in the barn with Gheorghe as barriers melt.

There's still some pain ahead, but Johnny's learning to be vulnerable; Gheorghe is patient and generous but knows when to draw a line. For a film where very little is said, it's extremely eloquent.

The two stand on the Yorkshire hills, dwarfed by the dark brooding sky as endless paddocks stretch into the horizon. This country, with its unrelenting seasons, its cycles of life, is an ideal place to be grounded, to learn to love and be loved, be connected, committed. Love is stronger for being forged in such a place.

In that context, this land is surely God's own.

DIFFERENT STROKES

STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN SINCLAIR @FORESPOKE

Coming out of a confronting covid lockdown, actor Tim Draxl has found painting is renewing his energy and self-confidence. He's now gearing up for his first solo art exhibition – oh, and a stage role, a new TV show, and an action film with Liam Neeson. He spoke to Ian Horner. Photography Sean Sinclair.

Actor Tim Draxl is super excited. His first solo exhibition of paintings opens this month at the Rex-Livingston Art + Objects Gallery in Katoomba in The Blue Mountains.

He's also shooting a new show for the ABC, *The Newsreader*. His lead role on stage in the covid-delayed *A Chorus Line* at Sydney's Darlinghurst Theatre is finally opening in August. And he's about to shoot an action film in Melbourne with Liam Neeson, no less, called *Blacklight*.

It's an awesome way to emerge from covid, especially for Tim. When so many creatives around the world used lockdown to push the boundaries of their talents in new ways, lockdown for Tim was the opposite.

He and his partner, Adrian Barritt, and their dog, Boss, spent eight weeks at the height of the pandemic with Tim's mum in an idyllic part of the world near the Minnamurra River on the New South Wales south coast.

> “There was a time when I edited myself in regard to my sexuality. I realise how much of myself I sacrificed…

“I went into lockdown intending to be incredibly creative,” says Tim via Skype from his artist's studio at home in North Bondi. “I'd always dreamt of having that kind of time to go somewhere beautiful to do just that.

“My mum is of an age where she was incredibly vulnerable to the virus, so it was beautiful to spend that time with her. We went for walks in the park and along the Minnamurra River; so picturesque.”

But he hadn't figured on covid-stress. He volunteered to do the grocery shopping and that was a nightmare. Compounding everything was the unrelenting news from overseas.

“My brother was in Italy and we were getting all this information from him before it broke on our news. It was freaking us out to the point where Mum and I had to ask him to stop sending us the information because it was terrifying us.”

His partner, “Adi”, still thinks Tim went overboard. He'd wear gloves and a mask to shop and his mum would spray him down, and all the shopping, with Glen 20 when he returned.

“The daily death toll across Europe was staggering. We were getting the stories direct from my brother. I'll never forget the nurse [Daniela Trezzi, 34, in the covid ward at a hospital near Milan] who unwittingly went to work while infected and passed it on to so many others who then died. The nurse committed suicide.”

Tim's mum, in her late seventies, had breast cancer again last year, and has a heart condition. “So I also had pressure from my three older brothers who were worried about her. With my brother in Italy hammering information into my head, no wonder my creativity went into shutdown.”

Though he didn't paint any canvases, he did paint the outside of his mum's house and completely redid her garden.

>>

Tim Draxl, painting himself out of a covid corner.

>> Now back in his studio, he's out from the covid cloud and immersing himself in his love of painting, focused by his up-coming exhibition. It's called *In Between: The Act Of Painting*, with layered references to his two professions. Being "between" jobs is an occupational hazard for all actors, though Tim has exciting stuff looming.

"Yes, and 'between' also refers to the space between a performer's public life and private life; importantly it alludes to that area between dark and light as we all emerge from covid lockdown."

Tim started painting in his teens, picking it up, putting it down, only getting serious about it in these last two years.

One of the appeals is the unmediated audience access it gives an artist, unlike actors whose work is always filtered through a director's vision and further manipulated by an editor. Painting is conceived and executed without a middleman.

"That's the joy of painting for me. It's completely within my control. Not that I'm a control freak by any stretch – actors can't be, though they're always trying to assert their ideas, how they see a character or a play.

"But there's a lot of similarity, too. The more I paint the more I realise how much one informs the other. The studio is my performance space, my paint clothes are my costume and, in a sense, I go into a character.

"I'm not a trained actor, I rely on instinct. I never went to NIDA or the Actors Centre. I learnt on the job, in the deep end. Same with painting. I'm not trained. I rely on instinct and experience and emotions. A big part of it is being open to learning. As an actor and a painter you're constantly learning.

> “
> Painting is therapy… a way of letting go of all that shit from the past. Not worrying about what people expect…

"Acting is a team sport. Painting isn't for anybody else. When I'm painting, it's my world, it's my head. I just need to show up to the studio."

Some days, showing up to the studio can be hard; a bit like writer's block. So, Tim has found something that makes him go to the studio every day: "I love watching old films so I play movies to get me here. If I'm going to watch a Hitchcock or whatever I may as well watch it here in the studio. If I pick up a brush that's a bonus."

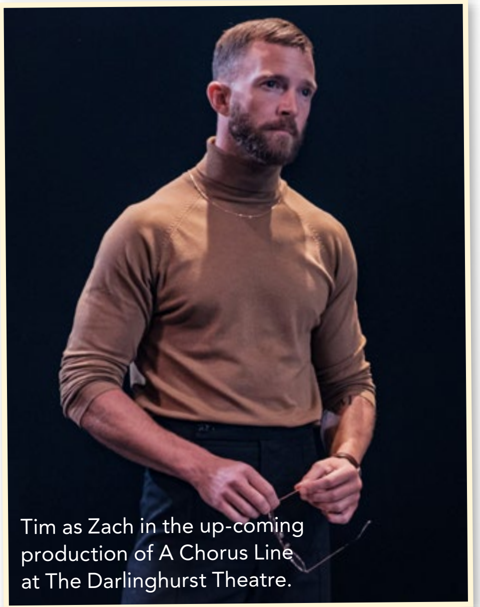
What did he paint while watching *Psycho*? "God, I've played *Psycho* here several times! There's probably a bit of *Psycho* in all of them! Not joking!"

Where acting is about the text, painting is more about the mood but, at the end of the day, an audience or the viewer of a painting will take away what they will.

"Yes, the beauty of both art and acting is that you can try to drum home a message but an audience or a viewer is always going to take away what they want to take away. One person's interpretation of a character or show can be very different to somebody else's. Same with painting, and that's the beauty of it.

"It's completely open to interpretation, especially with my art because I'm not painting objects but a mood or an atmosphere. I'm attuned to that so much because of my music background. I did masterclasses for kids' singing and I always used the terms 'colour' and 'light'. The same tools I use in painting.

"The vocabulary of singing is very similar to the vocabulary of painting. It's about colour and shade, and lightness and darkness, ensuring there's variation. As an actor with a character >>



Tim as Zach in the up-coming production of A Chorus Line at The Darlinghurst Theatre.

>> you are trying to get a message across, you must have an objective when you do a scene.

"With a painting I can let go of having any objective and that's a beautiful headspace to live in, not having to worry about people's approval. It's quite liberating."

> I've been known to paint without my shirt on… also without my pants on! I have to own that!

It's also liberating to paint shirtless, as depicted on these pages. It can get hot at North Bondi and his studio doesn't have air-con.

"Just a door and a little window. I've been known to paint without my shirt on. I've also been known to paint without my pants on! I have to own that!"

Clearly, working out is also part of his daily regime and it harks back 23 years to when he was 16.

"Yes, I remember the moment vividly. I was wearing a pink T-shirt from Marcs. David Campbell and I had the same manager and David said to him: 'Tim needs to get to a gym and fill out a bit.' I wasn't offended. I thought fair enough, I probably should. And every time I see a pink T-shirt I remember."

Now he finally has an opening date for the delayed *A Chorus Line*. It's a good opportunity to ask how an actor can take on a show that's been done so well and so often and make it fresh? That's the great conundrum of theatre says Tim and, surprisingly, also of painting. Freshness is the key factor, and it all comes down to whether you can ignore other people's expectations.

"I struggle the most when I try to be something for somebody rather than rely on instinct. Same with painting. Any time I try to reference a painter or a painting or style of painting, something subconsciously I've seen elsewhere, without fail, I get into trouble. It becomes forced.

"Performing is exactly the same. That's why I've never done a lot of those big musicals. Every time I go to the audition I try to pre-empt what I think they want and make the mistake of leaning into the American cast recording and the jobs don't happen.

"For *A Chorus Line*, which has been done constantly since the '70s, I sat down with Amy Campbell [director] and it wasn't about recreating anything. She wanted to do her version and she cast people who had an essence of the characters and she let us run on instinct."

In *A Chorus Line* Tim plays the director, Zach, irrevocably carved out by Michael Douglas in the movie. Zach is a hard taskmaster and straight to the point when it comes to cutting barbs as he drops the actors from the band of auditioning hopefuls.

How many times has Tim been subjected to a casting director saying, "Thanks for giving me your all – it's not enough, piss off"?

"Thankfully, I could count on one hand the number of times it's happened. I'm fortunate. It's always hard to take criticism. We all struggle with it. It's equally hard to deliver criticism.

"Even with my partner, if I subtly suggest he try something different it's always tricky and I'm not very good at it because I speak from the heart. It's very hard to sugar coat. I never mean to offend. In a personal relationship you develop ways of communicating that you both understand. It takes a long time and on a set you don't have that time.

> On *Place To Call Home* the minute there was a chance to talk about my sexuality I grabbed it. I needed to. I had to.

"But as hard as it is to take criticism, I much prefer someone to criticise me and help me get it right. I don't want anyone blowing smoke up my ass or placating me. Just say what needs to be said."

At least with theatre there's usually dedicated blocked-off time to get things right. Not so in movies, even less in TV. Presumably, there will be minimal time for developing character nuances for the action film with Liam Neeson?

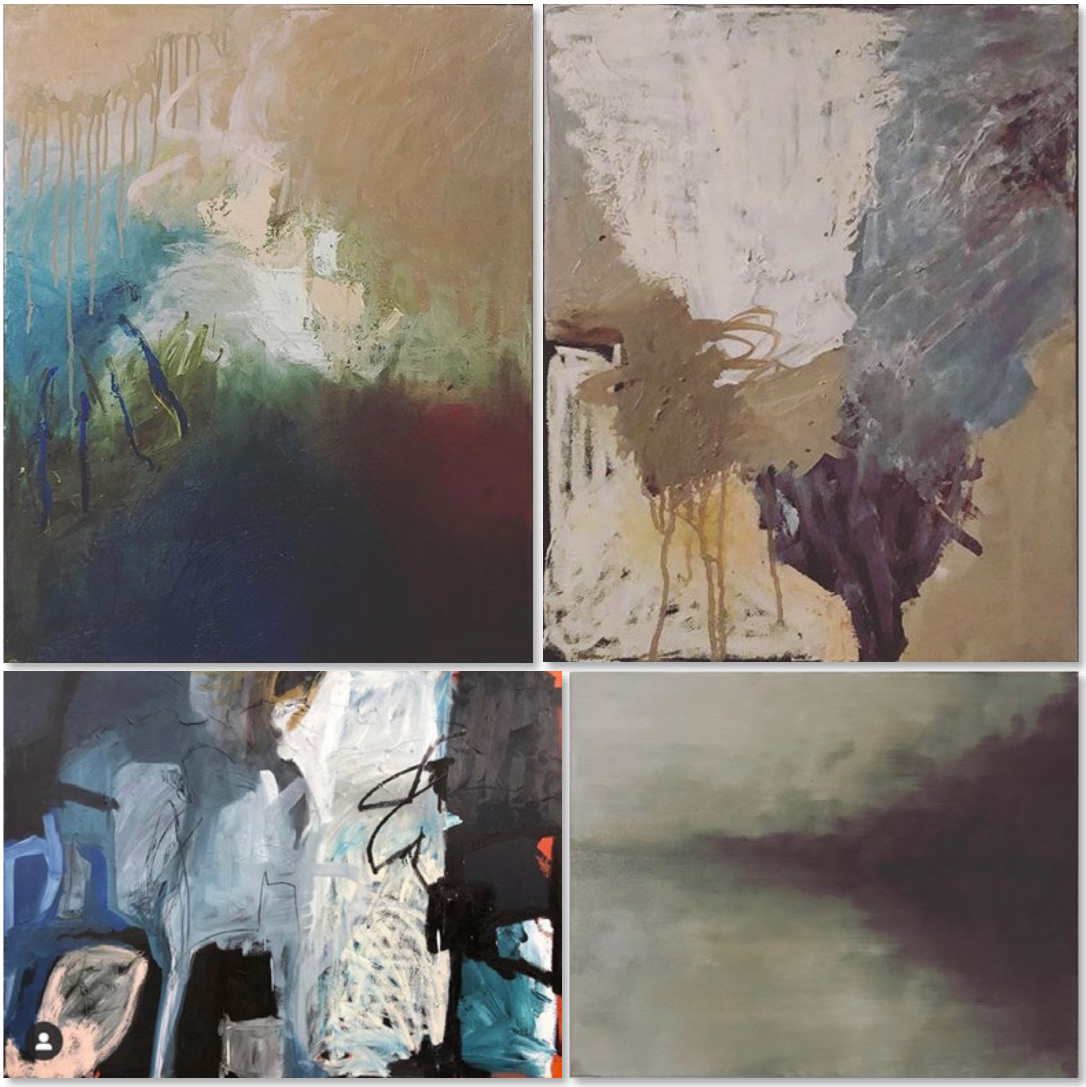
That's where homework comes into it, Tim says, but there is at least one spectacular action sequence that will need careful rehearsing for safety's sake.

It's been noted that so many Liam Neeson movies are the same but, equally, that they're great fun. He's brilliant at pulling off action stuff and imbuing it with character. The privilege of working with Neeson is not lost on Tim.

"Absolutely not! I'm so excited and incredibly grateful for the opportunity. Especially given what we've all just come out of.

"We're shooting in Melbourne and one sequence in Canberra because the film is set in Washington DC and they look similar. Liam plays an FBI agent who goes a bit rogue. There are lots of sub-plots and when I was discussing it with the director, Mark Williams [who directed

Tim as Dr Henry Fox in TV's A Place To Call Home.



The art of Tim Draxl: "Acting is about the text, painting is more about the mood… the viewer of a painting will take away what they will," he says.

Neeson in the covid-delayed *Honest Thief*], he admitted we're not making a particularly deep film. No strong social message.

"But, actually, the script is so relevant in terms of fake news and what goes on in government agencies that the public aren't told. I play the news editor of a publication who breaks a story with big consequences."

Our local screen industry is very different to the United States, Tim points out. In the US, they have a corporate ladder – you start at the bottom and work your way up. But not in Australia. "You spend four years on *A Place To Call Home* and you think it'll lead to something else, but it ends and you're back where you were before."

On *A Place To Call Home* was Tim cast as the gay doctor, Henry Fox, because he was gay or in spite of it?

"That's a very good question! A part of me would like to think I was cast because I was gay. There's a strong push at the moment for people to be represented fairly and equally, and truthfully. Lots of gay characters have been played by straights, which is never preferred. Playing that role changed my life."

How so? "I'd played gay characters before when I wasn't out. It hadn't been that important to me until *A Place To Call Home*. *Will And Grace* was the only show that dealt with homosexuality in a positive way, where gays weren't vilified.

"I played a gay character at the start my career in *Travelling Light* [2003] with Brett Stiller and Simon Burke. I discussed with my agent if I should or not because I was paranoid about being outed. Remember the good old days when people were outed?

"Cut to *A Place To Call Home* and the minute there was any chance to talk about my sexuality I grabbed it. I needed to. I had to. There's a lot of water under the bridge, but there was a time in my life when I edited myself. To my own detriment.

"It's had a lasting effect on how I approach the world, relationships, work, people, everything. As the years went on and those pressures were diluted, I started to realise how much of myself I'd sacrificed and lost. I'd be such a different person right now if I hadn't had to deal with those hetero-normative pressures of fitting in."

It was playing by someone else's rules that screwed him up.

"I'm at the stage in my life where I'm trying to get back some of those things I lost along the way and painting is helping me. In a way, it's therapy. It's a way of being free and letting go of all that shit from the past. Not worrying about what people expect or trying to fit their ideas of who I am.

"You know what? I don't actually care if you like my paintings or not. I enjoy doing them. I can step back when I've finished and say I like that. And it just so happens a few other people have liked them, too, and here I am with an art exhibition, which I can hardly believe!"

And it's affecting his acting. "I'm so excited about the film with Liam and also this ABC series [*The Newsreader*]. I'm actually very excited to get back onto a set to see how that attitude will be applied to my acting. When I discover things about myself through painting I get excited and I can't wait to see if I can apply that to other parts of my life. Which, surely, I will, and that's part of the thrill of painting.

"I've just discovered this Danish artist, Per Kirkeby, whose use of texture and colour is amazing. I've noticed some subtle colour references to his paintings in my work. You know sometimes when you hear a song and you just go, 'I've got to sing that song?' It's like that. I need to put my spin on it. Kirkeby is one of those painters for me. I've just got to sing that song." •

MORE: Tim Draxl's In Between: The Act Of Painting exhibits from January 9 at Rex-Livingston Art + Objects Gallery, Katoomba, NSW.

The opening will be live streamed on Facebook on January 9, 2pm to 4pm.
Gallery: rex-livingston.com.
Tim's artist page: rex-livingston.com/tim-draxl

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MAFUVIAN

SCOTT HOLT
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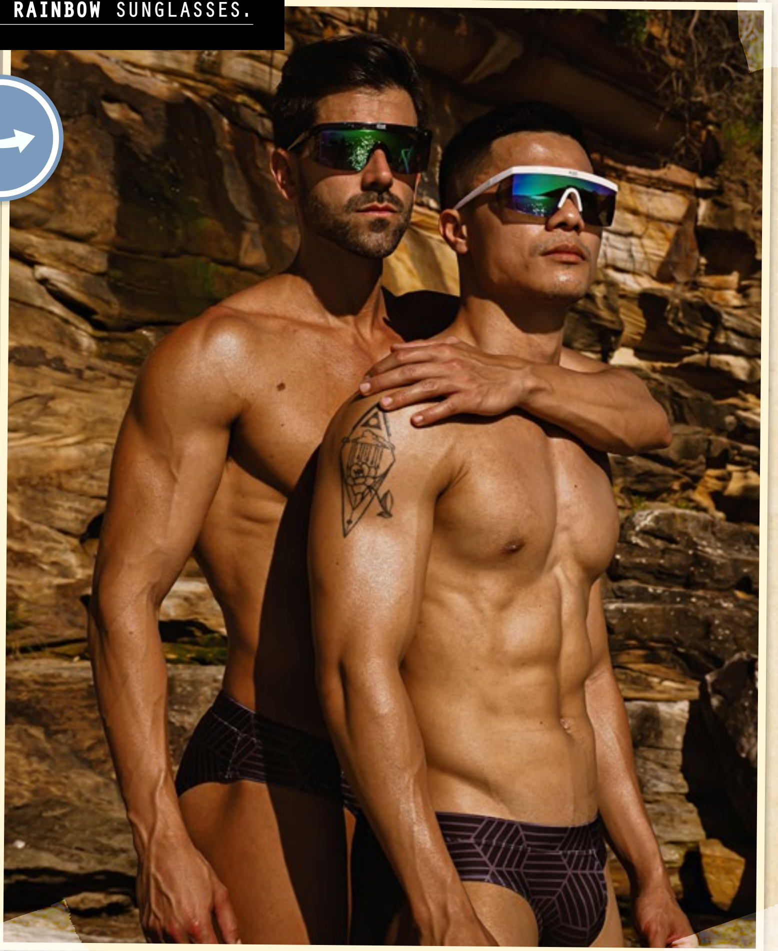
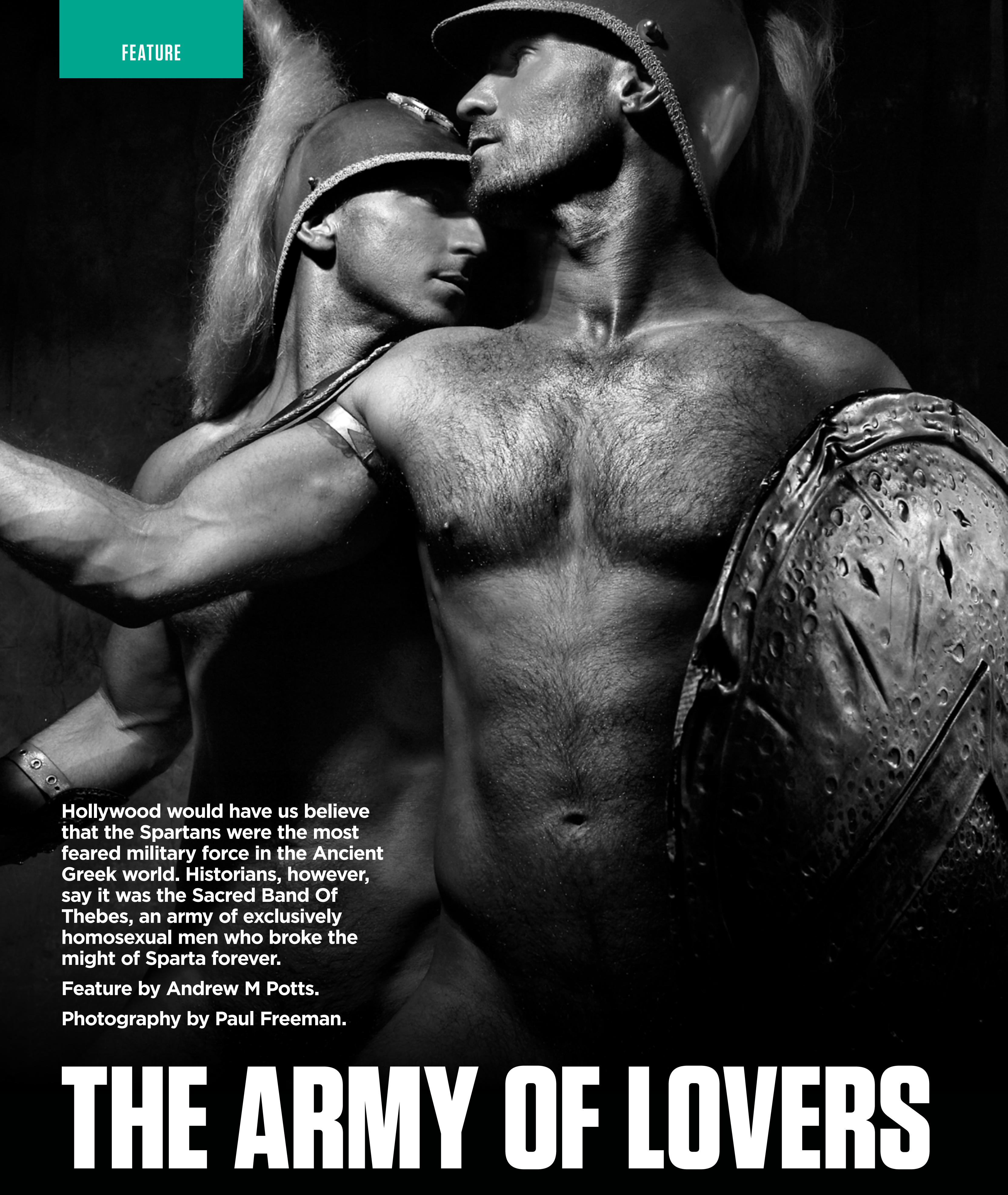
IVAN, SCOTT AND KIERAN WEAR **RUDE RAINBOW** SWIM BRIEFS WITH DRAWSTRING BEACH BAGS.

IVAN, SCOTT AND KIERAN WEAR **RUDE RAINBOW** SWIM BRIEFS AND **RUDE RAINBOW** SUNGLASSES.





Hollywood would have us believe that the Spartans were the most feared military force in the Ancient Greek world. Historians, however, say it was the Sacred Band Of Thebes, an army of exclusively homosexual men who broke the might of Sparta forever.

Feature by Andrew M Potts.

Photography by Paul Freeman.

THE ARMY OF LOVERS

Let me tell you a tale of the most feared shock troops of the Ancient Greek world.

It's not the Spartans, immortalised in the movie *300*, nor the Hoplite forces of the mighty city state of Athens.

Within one generation, these men raised their state out from under Spartan domination to become the preeminent power in Greece until the rise of Alexander The Great and his father checked them for good.

They were The Sacred Band Of Thebes and its soldiers were, exclusively, homosexual, fighting in pairs.

In Ancient Greece there was never a religious prohibition on sex between people of the same sex and it certainly wasn't illegal. Even Zeus, the king of the gods, had his own male lover, Ganymede.

As an extremely patriarchal society, love between men was celebrated and put on a pedestal by the Ancient Greeks. Yet that same misogyny meant that such relationships had to abide by a very specific code to remain respectable. Anal sex was considered an effective form of contraception by the Greeks, so to be on the receiving end was seen to reduce a man to the status of a woman. The older man in the couple could not be perceived to be the bottom, and anal sex between men generally was frowned upon.

When a man topped another man it was supposed to be "intercrural" – where the bottom grips the top's penis between his thighs rather than in his buttocks. Older men who wished to play the passive role were figures of ridicule and made fun of in comedic plays.

But, in reality, behind closed doors, all these rules would have been broken. Men having sex with men (what we would today call gay sex) would have done all the things in the bedroom that felt good to them that they still do today.

There was also no such thing as a rigid homosexual identity for the Ancient Greeks, with all people assumed to have a bisexual potential. Many young men who had male lovers would go on to marry women for the sake of procreation while also continuing to love and sleep with other men.

An exception to this rule, though, was The Sacred Band, which was famous throughout the Ancient world for two things – their military expertise and that its membership was exclusively made up of pairs of unmarried male lovers. The logic behind this was that a man with a wife and children would be likely to flee from the battlefield if the fight looked like it was lost, whereas a childless male couple would stand and fight to defend each other and, if one fell, the other would stay to avenge his death.

Men with families had good reason to flee the battlefield if they feared defeat as the price for any Greek city state that lost a war without a negotiated surrender could be extreme – the entire population could be enslaved and distributed among the victors.

The Sacred Band had their origin in a coup by democratic revolutionaries against the Theban's Spartan backed autocratic rulers in 378 BC, and it may be that these men were part of a homosexual undercurrent in Thebes as many of its leading figures appear to have been gay.

Following victory in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) against Athens and its allies, Sparta became increasingly domineering toward the city states that had fought on its side.

By 395 BC the Thebans had had enough of this and joined former foe Athens with the city states of Corinth and Argos in an open rebellion against Sparta.

This Corinthian War (395-387 BC) dragged on for eight years before a negotiated peace saw Thebes reduced to a client state of the Spartans, obliged to commit men and arms to fight alongside their Spartan masters whenever called upon.

> “
> A male couple would stand and fight to defend each other and, if one fell, the other would stay to avenge his death.

The subservience of their rulers to Sparta grated on the minds of many ordinary Thebans – particularly the young men who were expected to fight in Sparta's wars – and many began wishing to overthrow their rulers so that the Thebans could enjoy the system of government enjoyed by the Athenians – democracy.

One of these was a young man named Epaminondas. Noble by birth, Epaminondas' father had squandered the family fortune, leaving his son impoverished. With no land or business to support him. Epaminondas threw himself into training in the Greek martial arts in the city's gymnasiums and became a soldier for Thebes.

Called up by the Spartans to participate in an attack on the city of Mantinea in 385 BC, Epaminondas came to the rescue of another Theban fighter, Pelopidas, in an incident which may have directly inspired the creation of The Sacred Band.

The ancient historian Plutarch records, "Pelopidas, after receiving seven wounds in front, sank down upon a great heap of friends and enemies who lay dead together; but Epaminondas… stood forth to defend his body and his arms, and fought desperately, single-handed against many, determined to die rather than leave Pelopidas lying there."

Fighting back the enemy, Epaminondas took a spear in the chest, then a sword to one arm and was expecting to die when a group of Spartans led by the Spartan King, Agesipolis, barrelled past them, shoving them out of the way as they crashed into the enemy ranks.

Remarkably, both men survived their injuries, and the experience bonded Pelopidas and Epaminondas for the rest of their lives, throughout which they would support each other's political and military careers.

Epaminondas appears to have been exclusively homosexual and had pledged never to marry a woman. Pelopidas married and had children while also having significant relationships with men, and the pair became leading figures in the growing democratic faction within Thebes.

It's not hard to imagine why democracy would appeal to men like Epaminondas, whose hearts were exclusively for other men. Under oligarchy, power is typically handed down through generations of powerful families. But under Democracy, men could rise to power and influence based on merit, and same-sex couples could mentor and support each other's career ambitions and pass on power to one another by engaging in gay nepotism.

The rulers of Thebes were aware of this growing movement within the city and so called on the Spartans to send troops to occupy the Theban acropolis to protect them and to crush the democrats in the city in 382 BC.

Pelopidas escaped from the city to Athens with a group of other revolutionaries and was declared an outlaw. Epaminondas, being poor, was not considered a threat by the authorities, and was able to stay behind in Thebes where he began to train and organise the young men of the city for the fight to come.

The Spartans demanded the Athenians expel the Theban democrats but the Athenians chose to harbour them while they put their plans for revolution together.

When the day of their insurrection arrived in the winter of 379 BC, Pelopidas and his men disguised themselves as townspeople and snuck their way in through the city's seven gates by hiding in the crowds, before assembling at the villa of a wealthy ally. Then, in the middle of the night, they crept into the family compounds of Thebes' Spartan-backed rulers and slew them in their bedchambers.

With their rulers deposed, Plutarch records that the democratic faction "called upon the citizens to maintain their liberty," breaking open the city's armouries to arm all those Thebans who were ready to fight with them.

"Epaminondas… came in already armed, with a gallant train of young men and the best of the old," Plutarch records.

The Spartan garrison at the Theban acropolis consisted of about 1,500 men but, despite the commotion in the city, they failed to deploy to put down the uprising and instead barricaded themselves inside the citadel.

>>

>> Epaminondas and Pelopidas held a general assembly of the people where the priests of the city's temples called on the Thebans to fight for their freedom from Spartan oppression and the people declared Pelopidas and Epaminondas their liberators.

Pelopidas and his men then worked to storm the Theban acropolis to expel the Spartan troops before an army could come from Sparta to relieve them. Pelopidas and Epaminondas were able to negotiate the surrender and departure of the Spartan garrison and then set about planning how to confront the Spartan force that would inevitably arrive to put down their insurrection.

One of the chief advantages that the Spartans had over the other Greek city states was having a full-time professional military class that did not need to work to sustain itself. Spartan society was organised like a caste system with only a small number of ethnically Spartan military families at the top who ruled over the Perioeci, the people in the Spartan's captured territories who produced the food and goods for the Spartan state. Below the Perioeci were the Helots, the lowest of the low, virtual slaves who worked for the Perioeci, or worked the fields like peasants in return for paying a hefty tribute to their Spartan overlords.

Having fought side-by-side with Spartans, Pelopidas and Epaminondas saw the need for the Thebans to create their own elite, professional military unit that could challenge Spartan might on the battlefield. To do this, they called on the unmarried men in same-sex relationships among Thebes' warriors and began training them full time, with their living expenses paid by the city.

This band of 300 men swore sacred oaths of love and loyalty to each other, and so earned their name, The Sacred Band.

Epaminondas knew that the Thebans would be outnumbered by the Spartans and their allies when they arrived and so devised a plan to take the wind out of the opposing army's sails by using The Sacred Band as a unit of shock troops.

At this point in Greek history, battles were fought the same way they'd been fought for hundreds of years since the Persian War. Both armies would divide their men into opposing phalanxes. The men at the front would form a shield wall through which the men behind would push their spears. When the two armies clashed it would essentially become a rugby scrum until one side prevailed by breaking through the other's ranks and routing them.

It was the Spartan custom to concentrate their own ethnic Spartan fighters in their right most phalanx, with the other phalanxes made up of their more numerous allies from other cities.

Epaminondas knew what the Spartans would expect and so divided his men into three very shallow decoy phalanxes and one very deep, long phalanx, at the tip of which he placed the Sacred Band under Pelopidas' command.

Looking across the battlefield when the two armies finally met at Leuctra in 371 BC the Spartan king, Cleombrotus, only saw the front ranks of the Theban phalanxes and so did not divert men from his other phalanxes to oppose this lopsided assault.

When the battle began, Epaminondas charged this long, huge phalanx into the phalanx where the Spartan fighters were concentrated, overwhelming and then crashing through their ranks and killing King Cleombrotus.

At this point, the fighters of The Sacred Band separated from the main Theban phalanx and charged ahead to cut down fleeing Spartans.

Seeing the Spartans crushed in front of their eyes, their allies from the other city states lost their resolve and quit the field of battle before even exchanging blows with the Theban's decoy phalanxes.

As a result of the Battle Of Leuctra, the Thebans instantly became the most powerful city state in Greece. But that wasn't enough for Epaminondas, who led repeated invasions into the Spartan heartland and their captive territories in the Peloponnesus over the next 12 years.

> “Epaminondas... came in already armed, with a gallant train of young men and the best of the old.”
> – Plutarch

When he reached the city of Sparta itself, the Spartans closed all the gates to their city walls and refused to come out and fight, so the Thebans simply went around them, freeing the Perioeci and the Helots who had laboured for the Spartan state as they went, who then became their military allies.

In doing so, they took the Spartan's greatest resource and turned it back against them as a weapon.

Many of the Helots they freed were from the city state of Messenia who had been conquered and enslaved by the Spartans 200 years earlier, so Epaminondas rebuilt their city and put out a call for Messenian exiles from all over Greece to return to restore their city state. In doing so, he created another ally for the Thebans against Sparta.

However, Thebes' growing power in the region made the other Greek city states feel increasingly threatened and old enemies Sparta and Athens decided to forget their differences to unite with their allies against Thebes.

In 365 BC Epaminondas launched his final invasion against Sparta, again showing his military genius. His chief target was the city state of Mantinea, which had been resisting Theban influence in the region. To protect the city, the Spartan king Agesilaus II assembled a coalition of Athenian, Mantinean and Elian troops to resist the Thebans.

Now commanding a huge army of 30,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry, made up of the Thebans and their military allies, Epaminondas met a force two thirds their size at Mantinea in 362 BC, which would become the biggest land battle in Ancient Greek history and shake the foundations of the Greek world forever.

Not being content to simply rely on strength of numbers, Epaminondas devised a strategy to surprise his enemy. Rather than marching his army towards them he marched them parallel so that it appeared that he did not plan to fight that day and that his army was going somewhere else. He then ordered his men to sit down, giving the appearance that his army was preparing to camp for the night. Seeing this, the enemy, too, made camp but this was just a rouse and Epaminondas' troops suddenly stood up and charged them while they were unprepared.

Unfortunately, Epaminondas was fatally wounded on the battlefield, probably targeted by Spartans who hoped to demoralise the Thebans and their allies with his death or to avenge the death of King Cleombrotus at the Battle Of Leuctra.

As he lay dying, he asked one of his friends whether the battle had been won. Learning that it had, he said, “It is time to die.”

When the friend lamented that he would die childless, he replied, “No, by Zeus... I leave behind two daughters, Leuctra and Mantinea, my victories.”

Also killed in the battle were Iolaidas and Daiphantus, both his and each other's lovers, who Epaminondas had anointed to be his successors as leaders. When he heard they too had died he ordered the Thebans to make peace with their enemies despite their victory.

Without his leadership, Thebes began to wane in influence, but the Spartan's losses were too great for them to recover. This power vacuum allowed the Macedonians to rise to dominate Greece and then the whole of the known Ancient world through Alexander's conquests.

Pelopidas and Epaminondas had unknowingly had a hand in Thebes' own downfall. In 369 BC, Pelopidas had arbitrated a settlement between two claimants to the Macedonian throne. In order to increase Theban political influence in Macedon, he demanded hostages from both parties, and one of these was the young man who would become Philip II of Macedon – Alexander The Great's father.

Living among the Thebans he learned their fighting ways and battle tactics and so knew what to expect when it was time to meet his old captors again. >>

>> During his time in Thebes it is said that Philip was one of Pelopidas' lovers but he was long dead when Philip's army met The Sacred Band Of Thebes.

Pelopidas died in Thessaly in 364 BC during a campaign against another Alexander, the tyrant of the city of Pherae. Pelopidas' forces succeeded against Alexander of Pherae's much larger army, but Pelopidas rushed forward to kill the tyrant with his own hands and was instead cut down by his bodyguards.

Seven years later, Philip ascended the throne of Macedon. Three years later his son Alexander was born. Together in 338 BC they would destroy the Sacred Band Of Thebes forever. Until then they had never been defeated.

At the Battle of Chaeronea, Philip and Alexander finally extinguished Thebes' hegemony over Greece. Philip's army prevailed over a huge force of Thebans and Athenians and the many other Greek city states that had lined up behind them to resist the Macedonians.

> “When Philip saw their heaped corpses, he wept, declaring, 'Perish any man who suspects that these men either did or suffered anything unseemly...'

Overwhelmed, the Greeks routed and fled the battlefield but The Sacred Band stayed and fought on alone, refusing to surrender until every one of them was dead.

Plutarch records that when Philip saw their heaped corpses, he wept, declaring, “perish any man who suspects that these men either did or suffered anything unseemly,” in reference to their homosexuality.

Philip ordered that their bodies be buried together in a mass grave. A great monument, topped by a lion statue, was built over their tombs to mark the place of the battlefield. This monument still exists today, and when archaeologists excavated beneath this Lion Of Chaeronea in the late 19th Century they discovered 127 pairs of male skeletons beneath it.

It is generally accepted that these bodies are the last of The Sacred Band.

Three years later, the Thebans rose up again against Alexander The Great and he destroyed the city and sold the people of Thebes into slavery, wiping it off the map and dividing its lands among his allies.

However, it is said that later in his life, Alexander greatly regretted this and would grant any wish that was asked whenever he encountered a Theban.

Alexander's eventual successor to the Macedonian throne, Cassander tried to make amends for this also and had the city rebuilt and its population restored as Epaminondas had once done for the Messenians. •

MORE: The images in this feature are by Paul Freeman from his homoerotic photography book, Heroics. To purchase, go to www.paulfreeman.com.au/book-store

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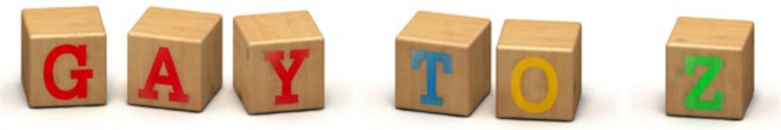

A DICTIONARY GUIDE TO STUFF GAYS LOVE
COMPILED BY PAUL JOSEPH AND TIM BENZIE

NEW YORK

ALAMY

Start spreading the news, we're feeling so gay. New York is a beacon of gay culture and history. It's where the Stonewall Riots thrust gay rights into the spotlight and, years later, the furious ACT-UP fought the homophobia at the heart of the AIDS crisis. It's where the freaks, queers and weirdos became the beating heart of the hedonistic disco scene, where Madonna honed her craft and Keith Haring painted the streets, where horny gay men fucked on derelict piers, where the Club Kids created the '90s party scene, and where Bette Midler starred in *Hello Dolly* on Broadway in the '10s. New York remains a vital hub in the global gay community and whether you're into sleaze or showtunes (or both) you'll always have a blast.

NETFLIX

A major global player in TV and film production, Netflix has steadily been bringing queer stories to a mainstream audience. GLAAD, the organisation that campaigns against negative portrayals of gay culture, consistently report that Netflix has the most regular and recurring LQBTQ characters of any streaming services. It was the birthplace of *Orange Is The New Black* and *Grace And Frankie*, and is now the home of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In 2018 Ryan Murphy signed a $300 million development deal to produce content over five years with his most recent offerings, *Ratchet* and *Hollywood*, explicitly placing LGBTQ narratives into existing stories. As well as its own content it hosts a diverse range of indie queer film, from new releases to cult classics, ensuring you can always have a big gay Netflix and chill.

THE DRAMA LEAGUE
FINANCIER patisserie

NPH with husband David Burtka.

NEIL PATRICK HARRIS

Why do we love Neil Patrick Harris? Is it that his hosting of the Tony Awards (in 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013) saw him leading such uber-camp numbers as *Make It Bigger* and *It's Not Just For Gays Anymore*? Or that he won a Tony in his own right in a revival of the queer rock opera *Hedwig And The Angry Inch*? Maybe it's because he started out as the overachieving *Doogie Howser MD*, mirroring many of our childhoods spent being a really, really good boy to compensate for an inevitably queer future? Or is it because after he came out he convincingly played an obnoxiously hetero character for nine years on *How I Met Your Mother*? Nah, it's the Broadway stuff.

NIGHTCLUBS

What a surprise that hanging out very late at night in cramped, sweaty surroundings with shirtless gay men would have such enduring appeal? Nightclubs, whether we're talking about cabaret haunts of Weimar Germany or disco meccas like Studio 54, have always appealed to the gay man looking for Mr Right Now to a pounding backbeat. It's true that nightclubs aren't strictly a gay phenomenon (and have become more mixed than ever), but it's also arguably true that the queer ones are better. Taboo anyone? Heaven (in its heyday)? Berghain? Or just a tiny hole-in-the-wall club where the crowd are drawing down the spirit!

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